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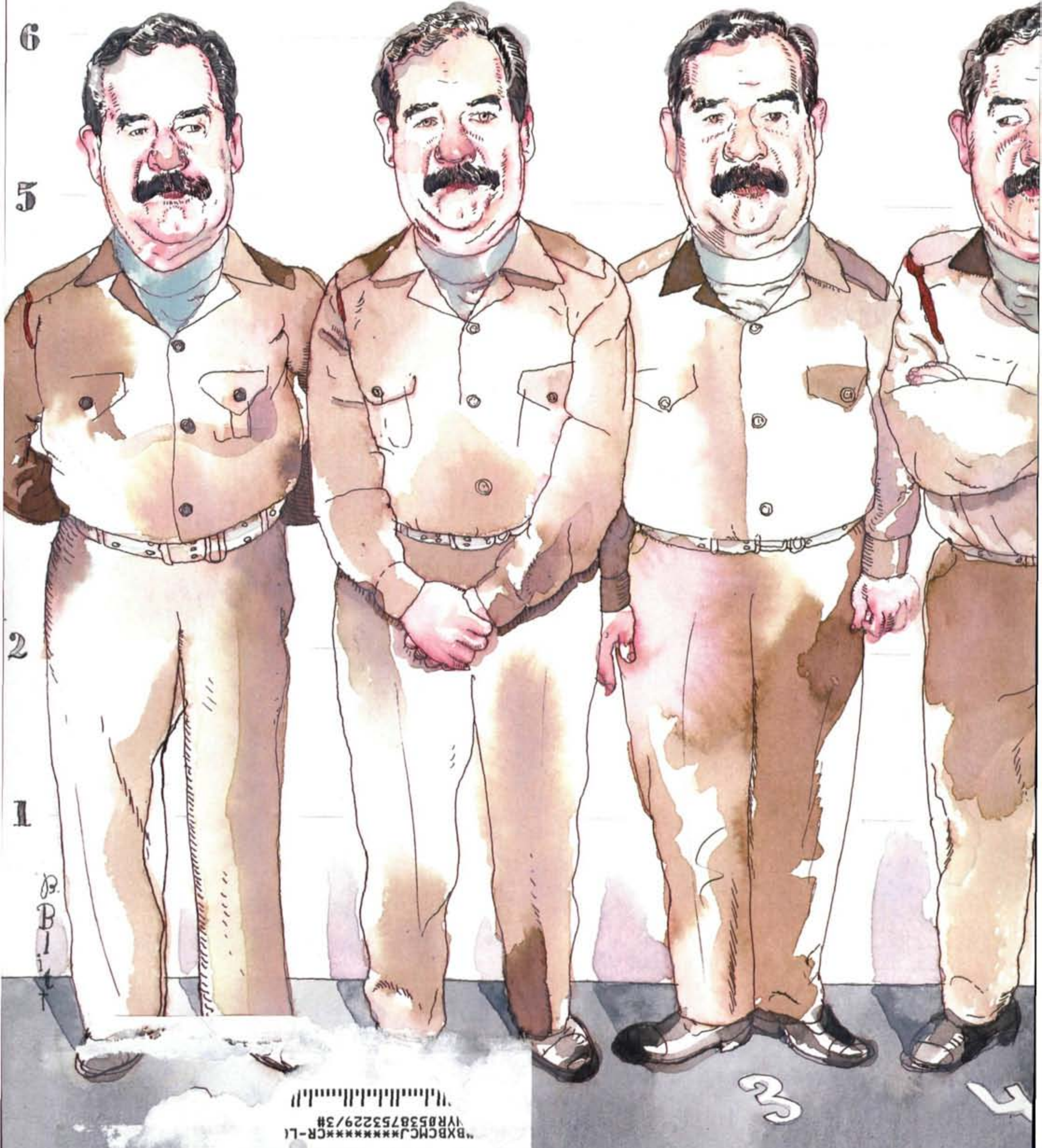
APRIL 7, 2003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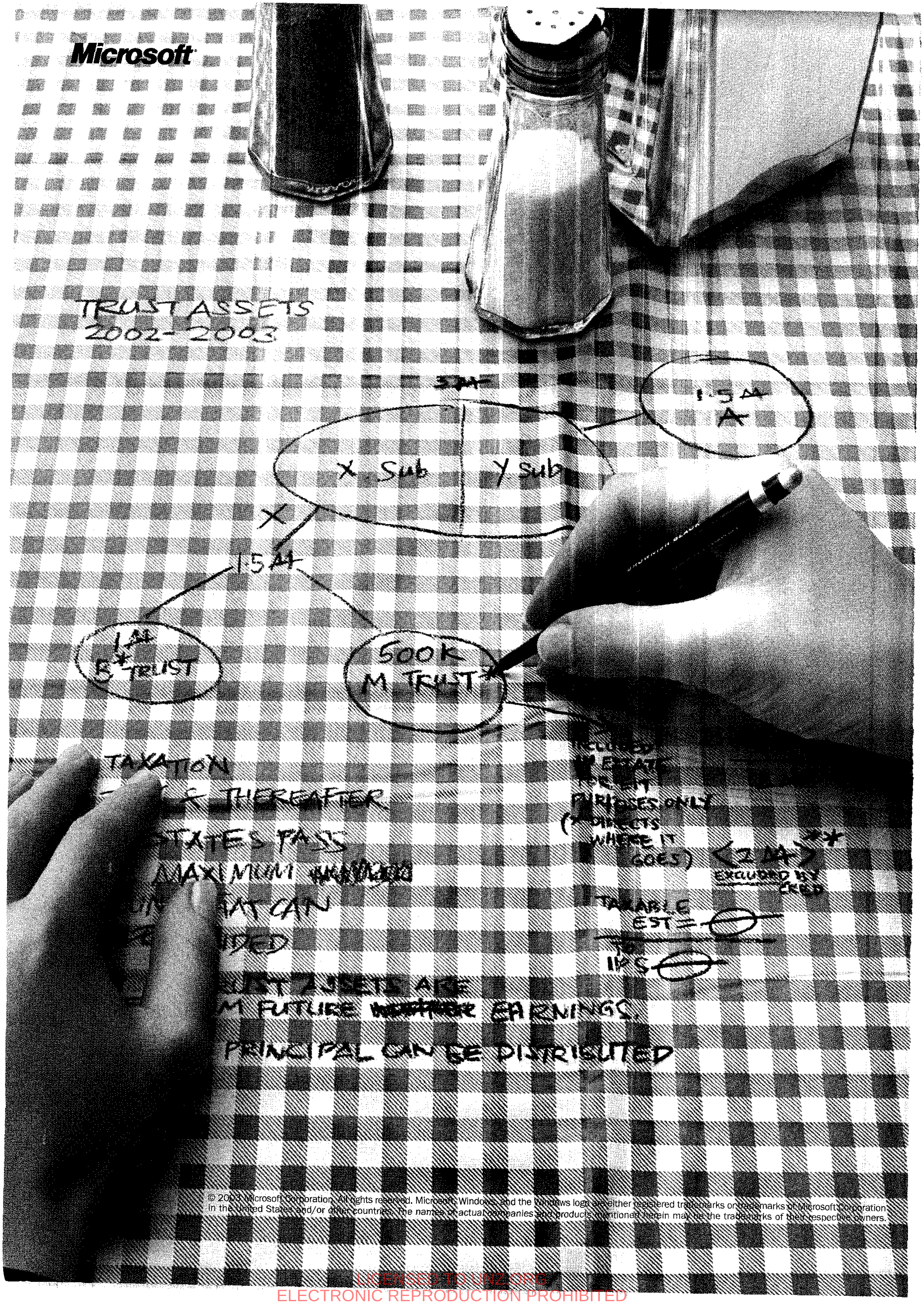
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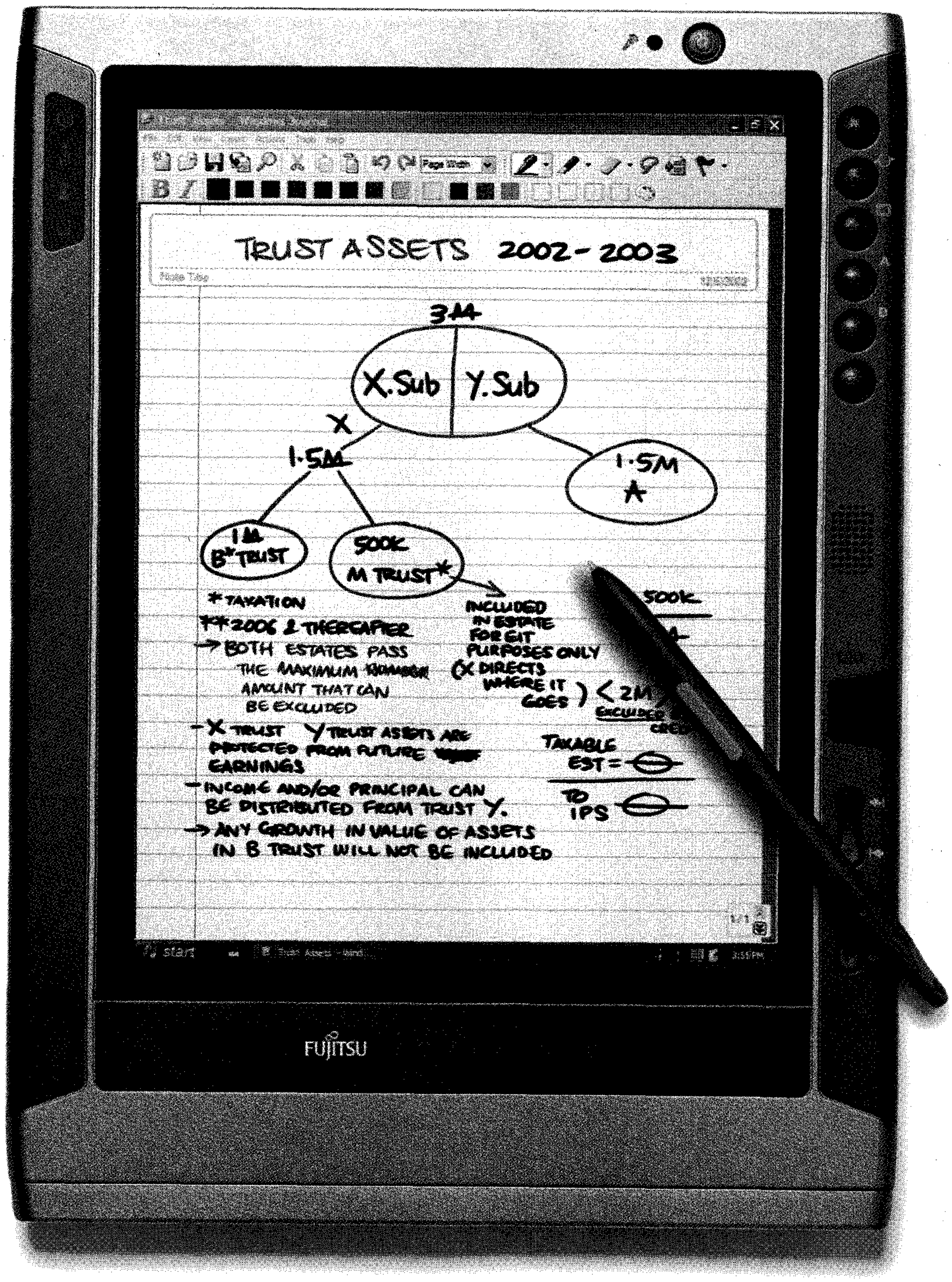
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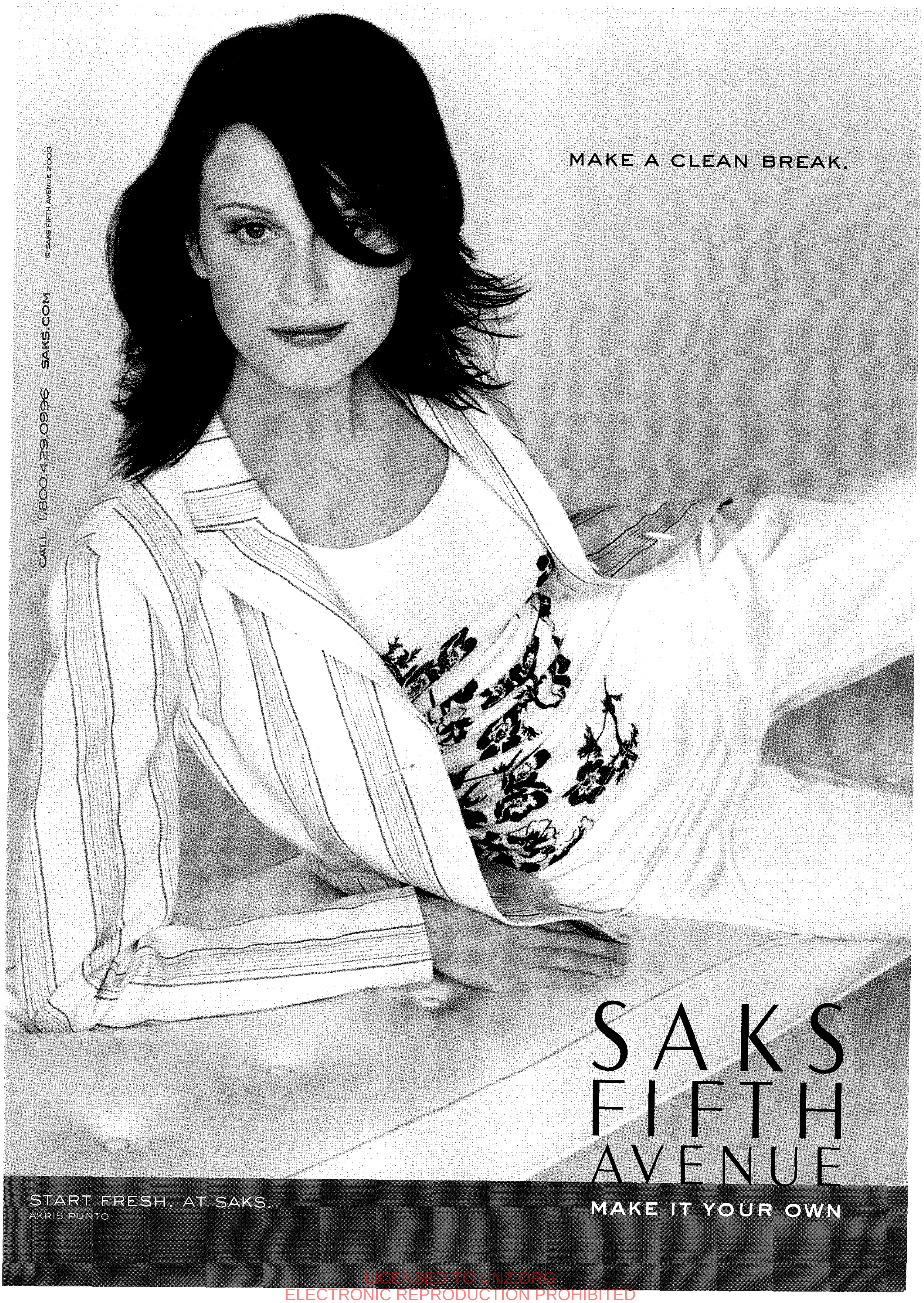

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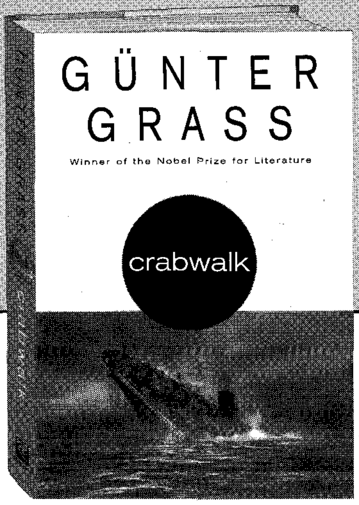

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–Newsday

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CONTRIBUTORS

John Cassidy ("The Investigation," p. 54) is a staff writer. His book, "Dot.Con," comes out in paperback this month.

Jon Lee Anderson ("Ill Winds," p. 38) continues his reporting on the war from Baghdad. His new book is "The Lion's Grave: Dispatches from Afghanistan."

Amitav Ghosh ("The Anglophone Empire," p. 46), a novelist, is the author of "The Glass Palace."

Jeffrey Goldberg ("Waiting at the Front," p. 48), a staff writer, is working on a book about the Middle East.

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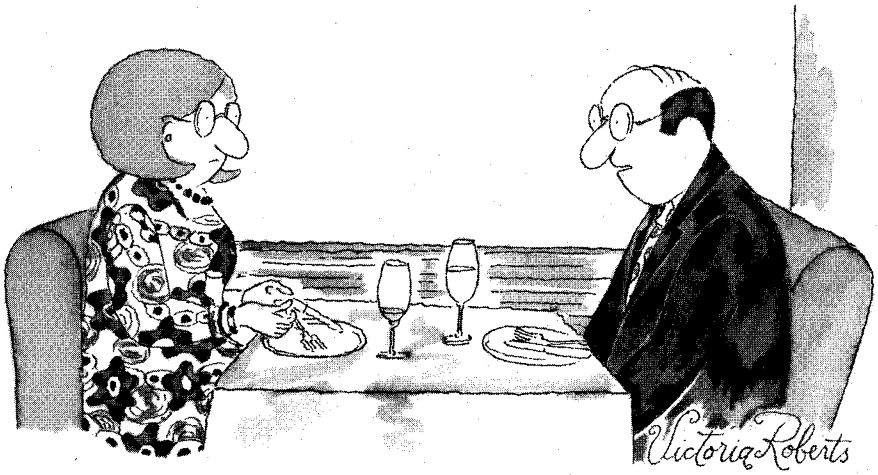
Margot Livesey (Fiction, p. 80) has published four novels, including "Eva Moves the Furniture" and "The Missing World."

Louis Menand (A Critic at Large, p. 88) is the author of "The Metaphysical Club," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize, and "American Studies."

Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 96) recently published "Nobody's Perfect: Selected Writings from *The New Yorker*."

Nicholas Lemann (Postscript, p. 98) writes about politics for the magazine. ♦



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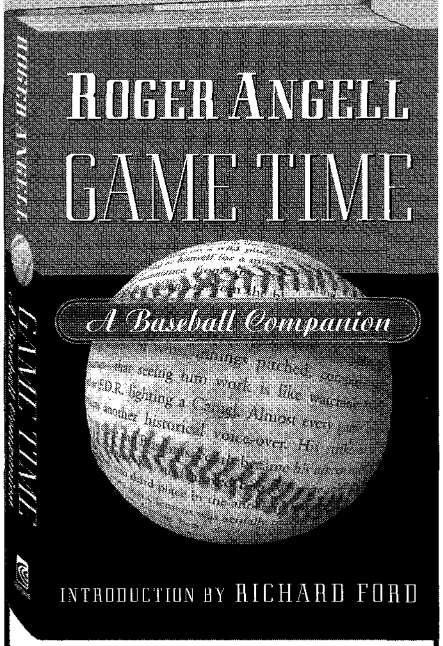

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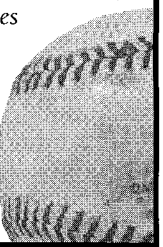

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THE ANTI-AMERICANS

Simon Schama's survey of the history of European criticism of America is highly selective ("The Unloved American," March 10th). He includes little of the appreciation of observers like Alexis de Tocqueville, who, for all his cool commentary, found much to admire here. At the same time, he quotes Knut Hamsun, the Norwegian writer, on America's distasteful patriotism, ignorance, and perceived inability to achieve "moral or cultural maturity." This is the same morally and culturally mature Knut Hamsun who later embraced Nazism, enthusiastically welcomed the occupation of his native Norway by Hitler's invading army, and presented the medal he had received with his Nobel Prize in Literature to Joseph Goebbels as a token of his esteem.

Andy Anderson
Bronxville, N.Y.

Frances Trollope, as Schama writes, had little but disdain for the ordinary people she met during her stay in America in the eighteen-twenties. But her son Anthony, after his own journey through the country, decades later, was, at least, ambivalent. For example, in his description of Lexington, Kentucky, he wrote, "I conceived rather an affection for those dirty teamsters; they answered me civilly when I spoke to them, and sat in quietness, smoking their pipes, with a dull and dirty, but orderly demeanor." And, reflecting on the Irish immigrants he met in American cities, "The Irishman when he expatriates himself to one of those American States loses much of that affectionate, confiding, master-worshipping nature which makes him so good a fellow when at home. But he becomes more of a man. He assumes a dignity which he never has known before." Trollope's words are all the more notable because he travelled in North America from September of 1861 to March of 1862, at the time of the Trent affair, which Schama mentions, when two Confederate agents were pulled off a British ship and tensions between America and England were running high.

George Butte
Professor of English, Colorado College
Colorado Springs, Colo.

LINDH AND THE LAW

I thought that our country had learned a valuable lesson about paranoia and unjust accusation during the McCarthy era. Apparently not. The treatment of John Walker Lindh, as described by Jane Mayer, is deplorable ("Lost in the Jihad," March 10th). If this is how we treat a U.S. citizen, what are the conditions like for Afghan prisoners in Guantánamo? It is regrettable that Lindh will have to spend twenty years in prison because he was not allowed due process. I am not half so frightened of war as I am of what we have let ourselves become in the name of justice and freedom.

Andrea L. Engel
Washington, D.C.

HAZARD ON THE HUDSON

Elizabeth Kolbert's article on Indian Point does a good job of explaining why many of us who live near the power plant are concerned ("Indian Point Blank," March 3rd). Nearly three hundred elected officials from the tristate area (I am one of them) have signed a resolution calling for the shutdown of Indian Point, and yet the decision about whether it stays open will be made by unelected, unaccountable Presidential appointees—members of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. One hopes that they will read this article, and see the dangers of a plant that places twenty million people within a fifty-mile radius at risk.

Paul Feiner
Town Supervisor
Greenburgh, N.Y.

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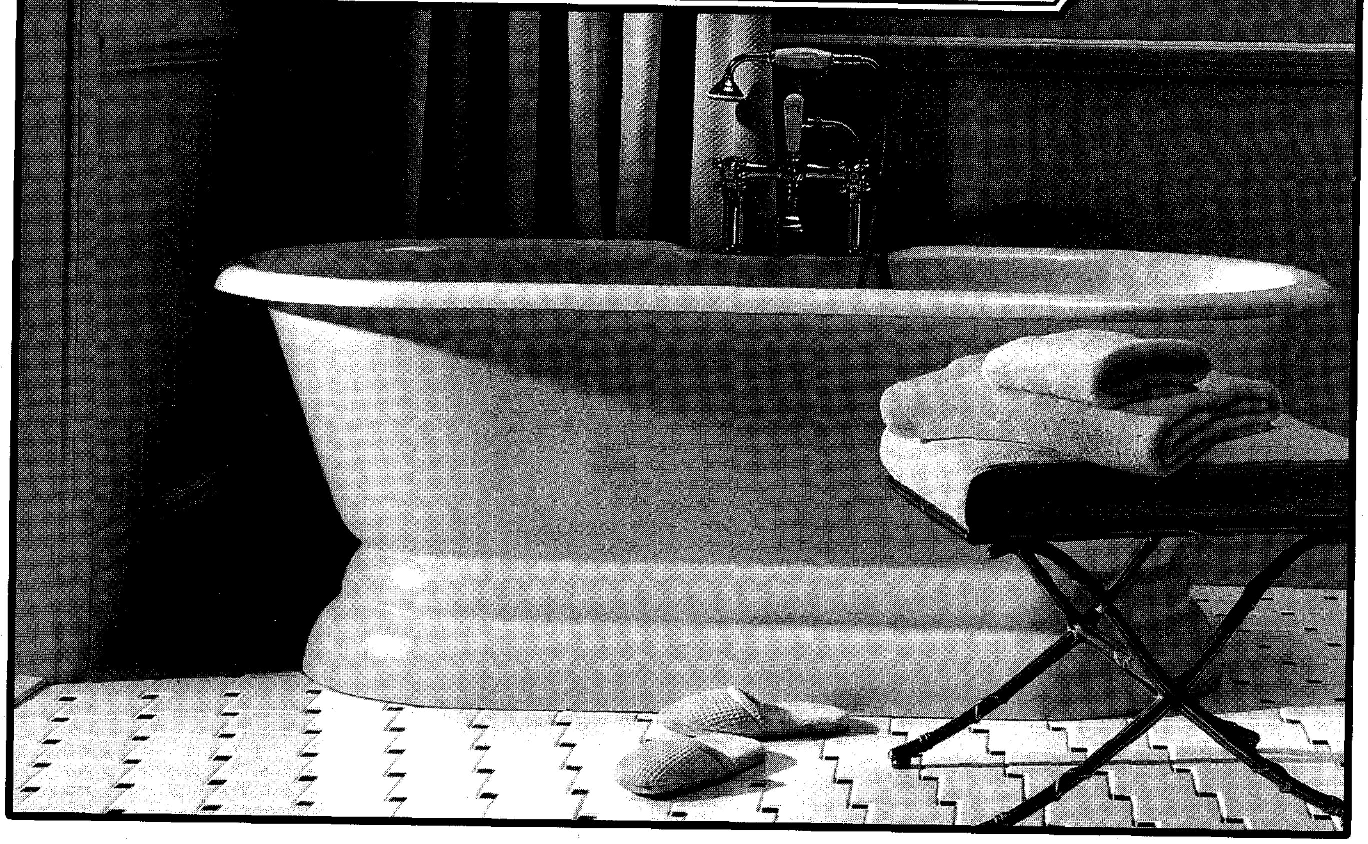
AMERICAN INSPIRATION



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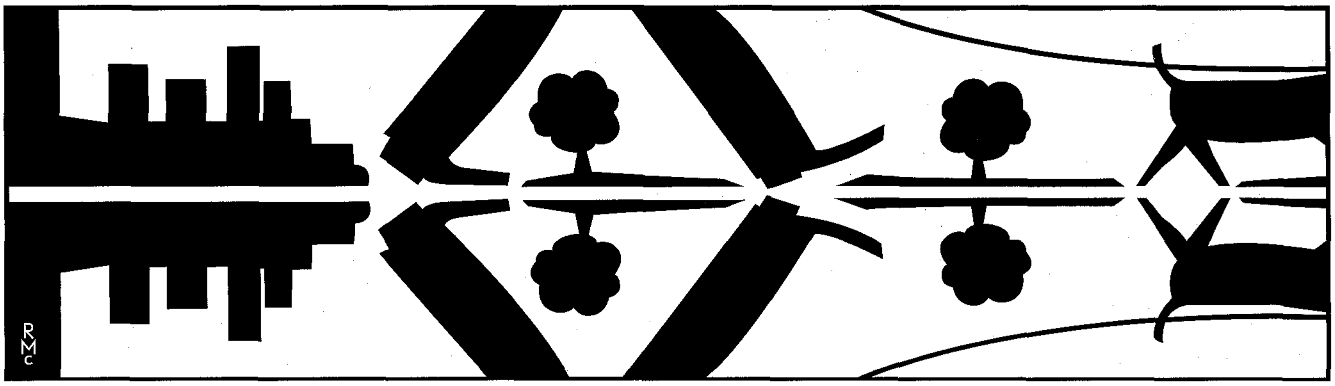

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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AS YOU LIKE IT
Erica Schmidt brings her popular 2000 Fringe Festival production of Shakespeare's play, first performed in a downtown parking lot, to the Public. Six actors play fourteen parts, with Bryce Dallas Howard as Rosalind. In previews. Opens April 6 at 7. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

A DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG
Eddie Izzard and Victoria Hamilton star in a revival of Peter Nichols' dark comedy, which has travelled to New York from London's West End, about a couple raising a handicapped child. Directed by Laurence Boswell. Two previews on April 2. Opens April 3 at 7. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE ISLAND
Athol Fugard's apartheid-era play comes to BAM in a production that stars the original 1973 cast members John Kani and Winston Ntshona. April 1-6 and April 8. Through April 13. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

THE JACKIE WILSON STORY
The Black Ensemble Theatre Company's musical about the famed R. & B. singer (who died penniless in 1984 after spending more than eight years in a coma) comes to the Apollo Theatre after a national tour. With Chester Gregory II as Wilson and Melba Moore as his mother. Written and directed by Jackie Taylor. Previews begin April 3. Opens April 6 at 7:30. (253 W. 125th St. 212-307-7171.)

THE LOOK OF LOVE
The Roundabout Theatre Company presents a musical revue of the songs of Burt Bacharach and Hal David—from "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" and "Walk On By" to "What the World Needs Now." Directed by Scott Ellis and choreographed by Ann Reinking. Previews begin April 4. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE NEW YORKERS
This 1930 Cole Porter musical comedy, based on the cartoons of the *New Yorker* cartoonist Peter Arno, has been revived by Musicals Tonight! The artistic director, Mel Miller, has massaged the libretto and expanded the song list, with the permission of the Cole Porter trust. Songs include "Love for Sale," "I Happen to Like New York," and other hits. Opens April 2 at 2:30. (14th Street Y, 344 E. 14th St. 212-296-1515.)

NINE
The Roundabout Theatre Company presents a revival of the Tony Award-winning musical based on Fellini's "8½," performed by an all-star cast that includes Antonio Banderas, Laura Benanti, Jane Krakowski, Mary Stuart Masterson, and Chita Rivera. David Leveaux directs. In previews. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

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TALKING HEADS
Six solo plays by Alan Bennett ("A Chip in the Sugar," "Miss Fozzard Finds Her Feet," "Bed Among the Lentils," and others) come to the Minetta Lane Theatre, in two alternating programs. Michael Engler directs. In previews. Opens April 6, program A at 3 and program B at 7. (18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 212-307-4100.)

THWAK
The Umbilical Brothers, a comic duo from Australia, return to New York with their neo-vaudevillian routine, in which they taunt and tease each other, clown with the mike, and act like living cartoons—creating goofy sound effects, which they respond to with rubber-limbed acrobatics. Opens April 4 at 7. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE WOMEN OF LOCKERBIE
In Deborah Brevoort's play, written in the form of a Greek tragedy, a man and woman travel to Lockerbie, Scotland, to visit the site where their only son died in the crash of Pan Am Flight 103. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. Opens April 6 at 7. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AVENUE Q
This uproarious new musical tells the story of a group of neighbors struggling to make it in New York City. Unlike another musical with a similar theme—"Rent"—the show doesn't deal with life-and-death issues, and many of the neighbors are cloth puppets (the nimble puppeteers are veterans of "Sesame Street"). This could sound like a recipe for juvenilia, but the end product is wicked fun—and definitely for grownups. Subversive, cheerful songs by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx address drunkenness, promiscuity, and racism with winking matter-of-factness, and the director, Jason Moore, guides the absurdity with zest. With a band led by Gary Adler, puppets designed by Rick Lyon, and book by Jeff Whitty. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

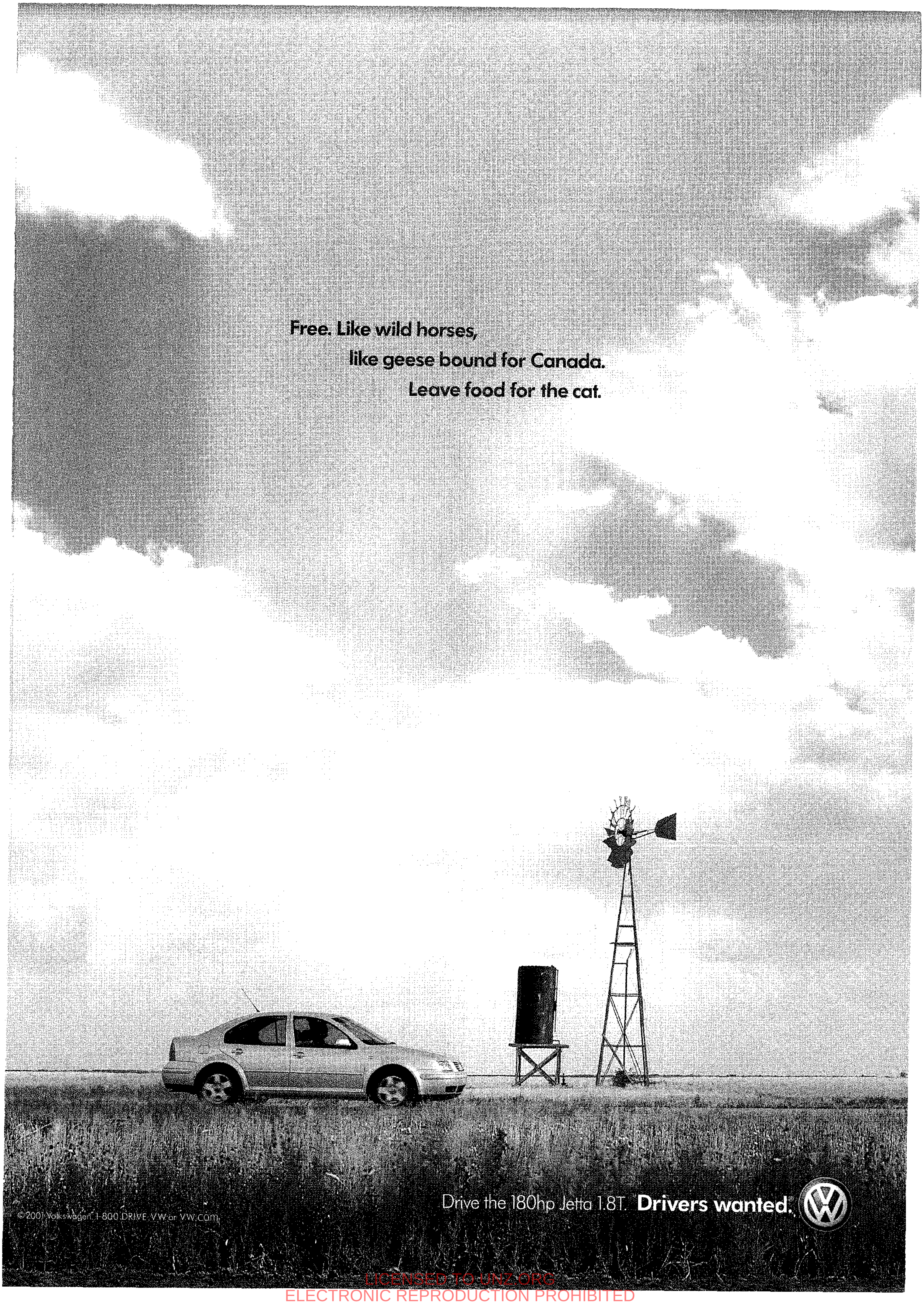
BARBRA'S WEDDING
If "Seinfeld" was a show about nothing, Daniel Stern's comedy is a play about nothing—although this nothing is really something. A neurotic out-of-work actor (John Pankow) spends the day in his modest Malibu bungalow kvetching at his wife (Julie White) as helicopters and names-in-bold descend on Barbra Streisand's nearby mansion for her wedding. Neil Patel sets the mood with a detail-perfect set—a middle-class California living room and kitchen whose walls shake when the whirlybirds fly over. Well directed by David Warren. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE BLACKS: A CLOWN SHOW
The blacks of the title are on trial for the murder of a white woman, but the underlying theme of Jean Genet's play isn't murder, it's the tension between blacks (the underclass) and whites (who represent authority). In the Classical Theatre of Harlem's staging, the whites who condescendingly judge the defendants—the Queen, the Judge, the Pope, and so on—are played by black actors in masks. As the two groups interact, they treat us to lyrical discourses on colonialism, sex myths, and the nature of power. This extraordinary production, which combines elements from minstrelsy, commedia dell'arte, and Chitlin Circuit routines, has been arrestingly directed by Christopher McElroen; on occasion, the actors single out members of the audience, involving them in the drama. (East Thirteenth Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-206-1515. Closes April 6.)

BRACE UP! (2003)
The Wooster Group's exceptional reimagining of Chekhov's "Three Sisters," which it first performed in 1991, includes elements of Kabuki and video projection. As ever, Olga, Masha, and Irina live with their brother, Andrei, in a provincial town, longing for Moscow, but here the actors recite Chekhov's lines as if they were props, things that support the action but wouldn't be missed if mislaid. As Andrei's wife, Natalya—the social-climbing rube who tries to break through the sisters' decorum—Anna Köhler provides the show with its emotional center, exposing the trap of the family's snobbery. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/10/03.) (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-858-2424. Closes April 13.)

COMMUNICATIONS FROM A COCKROACH
Don Marquis's Archy and Mehitabel sketches come to the Bowery Poetry Club, in a revival, with puppets, of the Ralph Lee Mettawee River Theatre Company's 2001 production. (308 Bowery, 212-614-0505.)

DON JUAN
Theatre for a New Audience closes its season with Christopher Hampton's translation of Molière's play, with Byron Jennings as Don Juan and John Christopher Jones as his servant, Sganarelle. Directed by Bartlett Sher. (Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-239-6200.)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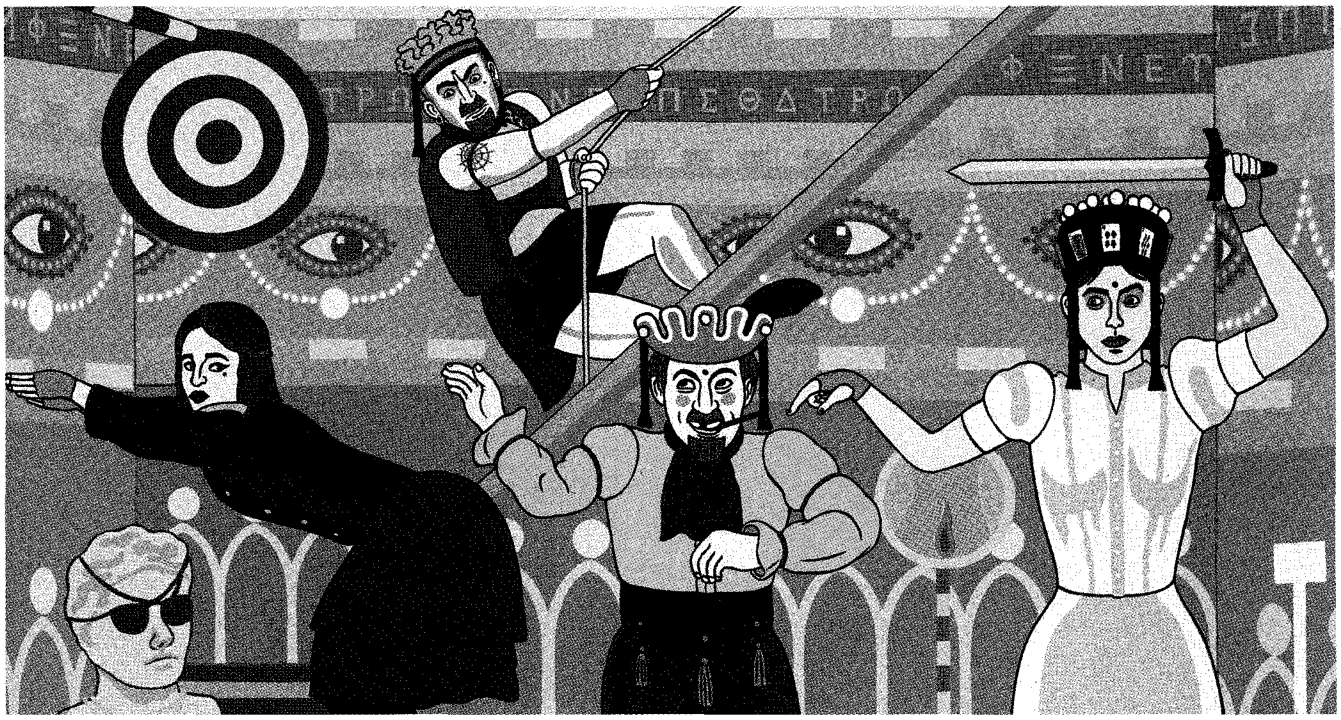

Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre performs "Panic! (How to Be Happy!)" at St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie.

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

EMPRESS OF CHINA
The Empress Tzu-Hsi ruled China for some forty years in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This play, written by Ruth Wolff and presented by the Pan Asian Rep, focusses on the last years of the nineteenth century, during which the Boxer Rebellion started and the Empress attempted to deport the European legations that were gaining power in China. The script is rather heavy-handed and histrionic, especially in the second act, but the performances by Tina Chen, as the "Dragon Empress," convinced of her rights and her righteousness, and by Arthur T. Acuña, as an actor who falls under her sway, give the show some sizzle and snap. Directed by Tisa Chang, with beautiful costumes by Pei-Chi Su. (West End, 263 W. 86th St. 212-279-4200.)

FIFTH OF JULY
Rarely has dialogue flown as surely as it does in this 1978 play, the first in Lanford Wilson's trilogy about the unconventional Talleys of conventional Lebanon, Missouri. Michael Cerveris plays Kenny Talley, paralyzed in the Vietnam War, whose terror of his future is more moving than his inability to walk, and Parker Posey plays Gwen, the woman married to the hunk John Landis (well played by David Harbour), whom Kenny and his sister, June, both lusted after at Berkeley. Posey's Gwen is vital, mischievous, and surprising—a generous narcissist. The cast members work superbly together, fired by Jo Bonney's direction and Wilson's dynamic script. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. Closes April 6.)

FUCKING A
A new play by Suzan-Lori Parks bundles together abortion, murder, meat, the criminal-justice system, racism, class struggle, catchy (yet derivative) blues songs, and a made-up gynecological language called Talk. The result is a pungent concoction of uncertain power—like a witches' brew that tough kids whip up, hoping that enough foul ingredients will make something dangerous and supernaturally charged. Directed by Michael Greif. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. Closes April 6.)

GOLDA'S BALCONY
In William Gibson's one-woman show about Golda Meir—the Russian immigrant from Wisconsin who helped create the state of Israel and eventually became its prime minister—Tovah Feldshuh demonstrates how national and family passions blend in the heart, making dispassionate judgment impossible. Dressed in a bathrobe or in a skirted business suit, smoking all the while, Feldshuh retraces the stateswoman's personal and political battles, taking on her father, her husband, her generals, and Henry Kissinger, and, in one instance, inmates of a Jewish internment camp on Cyprus (she persuaded adults to allow children to emigrate to Israel before them). Feldshuh shows that, even if Meir gave more time to the Jewish state than to her son and daughter, she could not be said to have put the interests of Israelis above the interests of her own children; to her, they were one and the same. Scott Schwartz directs. (55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200.)

HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY
In Randal Myler's beguiling musical biography of the hard-drinking, softhearted crooner, Jason Petty retraces Williams's journey from hardscrabble childhood to honky-tonk renown. The audience keeps him company all the while, tapping their toes even when he's so lonesome he could cry. (Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

LIFE (X) 3
A new comedy by Yasmina Reza ("Art") stars Helen Hunt and John Turturro and is directed by Matthew Warchus. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200.)

OBSERVE THE SONS OF ULSTER MARCHING TOWARDS THE SOMME
On a beautiful set, built by Alexander Dodge and lit by Donald Holde, a platoon of Irish Protestant volunteers struggle with their pride, their fear, and their duty on the eve of one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War. The fine and versatile ensemble is well equipped to carry off Frank McGuinness's charged dialogues, and Justin Theroux shines as the lone toff in the bunch, and the lone survivor. Directed by Nicholas Martin. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. Closes April 13.)

O JERUSALEM
A. R. Gurney's darkly comic drama about the diplomatic failures that preceded 9/11 indicts the American political psyche through close scrutiny of a weak, well-meaning governmental Everyman, Hartwell Clark. Clark (Stephen Rowe) is a self-delighted Yalie oilman married to a Texas heiress. When George W. Bush becomes President, Clark lands a diplomatic post in the Middle East, and in Beirut, he runs into an old lover, Amira (played with glinting fervor by Rita Wolf), a Palestinian whose son is a member of Hamas. The cast delivers Gurney's briskly paced lines with humor and bite, and the play is strong when it is personal and satirical, but Gurney's audacious premise—that the 9/11 attacks were directly tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and could have been prevented—overreaches. "We are all in this thing together," Hartwell says, but his dilemmas don't really help us understand how we got into this thing in the first place, much less how to get out of it—but then that's not only a problem for playwrights. Directed by Jim Simpson. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-226-2407.)

OUR LADY OF 121ST STREET
Stephen Adly Guirgis's play speaks gorgeously to our deracinated times. A group of fractured souls congregate at the Ortiz Funeral Home in Harlem to mourn Sister Rose—a nun who had taught most of them as children—but the wake turns into a vigil when Sister Rose is stolen from her casket. Guirgis's brilliantly drawn characters have been punished by life after their school days and exhausted by their grievances. Burnished to a shine by Philip Seymour Hoffman's deft direction, "Our Lady of 121st Street" is a fever chart of the heart's deceptions. (10/14 & 21/02) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-307-4100.)

PANIC! (HOW TO BE HAPPY!)
In "Panic," the avant-garde director Richard Foreman revisits themes he has explored in previous work: the limitations of language, the way that a performance reshapes itself during viewing, and the differences between men and women and how their attempts to connect generally end in some kind of violence. Watching the four main performers who make up the nucleus of Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, we know we're in the presence of an ensemble in the best sense of the word. The actors embody separate aspects of Foreman's dense, difficult, often hilarious mind, working together. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-533-4650. Closes April 13.)

THE PLAY WHAT I WROTE
Mike Nichols helped bring this hit play over from London, about one-half of a comedy duo who wants to dump his partner and put on his own play but first needs to cast a major actor to play his co-star. Starring Sean Foley and Hamish McColl as the team, with a secret roster of guest stars. Kenneth Branagh directs. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

REDBIRD
A new play by Clay McLeod Chapman sets a philosophical, absurdist drama about isolation and chaos in the subways of Manhattan. The ensemble cast

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Byron Jennings as Don Juan, Sherri Parker Lee as Elvira, and John Christopher Jones as Sganarelle, in Molière's "Don Juan," directed by Bartlett Sher, at the Lortel.

DUDLEY REED

includes Hannah Bos, Abe Goldfarb, Bradford Louryk, and Phoebe Ventouras. Directed by Isaac Butler. (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 212-352-3101. Closes April 5.)

TEA AT FIVE

Matthew Lombardo's play about Katharine Hepburn is a theatrical homage: whether or not you like it will depend on the degree of your fascination with the leading lady herself. This one-woman show, performed by Kate Mulgrew, who bears an uncanny resemblance in face and voice to the star, is set at Hepburn's estate in Connecticut at two junctures in her career: in 1938, after a series of flops, as she waited to hear if she would be cast as Scarlett O'Hara, and in 1983, as she struggled with Parkinson's and considered whether to resume acting after a long hiatus. Directed by John Tillinger. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

URBAN COWBOY

Comparisons to the 1980 film starring John Travolta and Debra Winger are inevitable but silly: the movie was an intimate study of class and sex differences, while this musical is big, brash, eager to please, and none too subtle. The story is the same: small-town Texan comes to Houston, meets girl, falls in love, marries girl, then gets rattled by her need to prove her mettle by riding the mechanical bull at the local beer hall. The savvy director, Lonny Price, keeps the action going and leaves out the explication. What the show lacks in depth the singers and dancers make up for with energy, verve, and well-toned calves and abs, but it's hard to feel anything strongly about the performers except that they are too heavily miked. Matt Cavenaugh, as Bud, recalls a young John Raitt, handsome and reliable, while Sally Mayes and Rozz Morehead provide able comic relief. Marcus Chait adds sex appeal as Wes, a spoiler who uses his wily intelligence to snake his way in between Bud and his girl, Sissy (Jenn Colella). Choreographed by Melinda Roy, with musical direction by Jason Robert Brown. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

VINCENT IN BRIXTON

Nicholas Wright's play about the young Vincent Van Gogh's affair with his London landlady shows one complicated collision between genius and domestic order. As the artist, the Dutch actor Jochum ten Haaf gives a startling portrayal of the ugly, messy pursuit of love and the recklessness of self-invention. Even in his quiet moments—when he's listening or waiting for a response—he vibrates with a love of performance that merges with Vincent's love of painting. Under the masterly direction of Richard Eyre, Vincent undresses the soul of his older lover, Mrs. Loyer (Clare Higgins), and Higgins lets us see the striptease. (3/17/03) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

ZANNA, DON'T!

All the students at Heartsville High are gay, so calamity ensues when the football quarterback and the female lead in the school play (about heterosexuals in the military) notice that they have feelings for each other. This perky and adorable musical is so bubblegum flavored that it could almost cause sugar shock—but the wit of the script cuts the sweetness. Costumes and sets come in several shades of pink, Tim Acito's melodies are a step away from boy-band pop, and the multiethnic performers seem to have been teleported from the Florida set of the "Mickey Mouse Club." Jared Zeus, as the clumsy quarterback, and Anika Larsen, as a white soul-singing lesbian, stand out in the youthful, talented cast. Directed and choreographed by Devanand Janki. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

DANCE

BALLET TECH

Eliot Feld's season at the Joyce continues, featuring new and repertory works that stress athleticism and the musculature of the body. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. For full schedule, call 212-242-0800. Through April 13.)

RISA JAROSLOW & DANCERS

When Risa Jaroslow's mother began a career as a classical bassist in the nineteen-forties, it wasn't easy to be a female musician. "Strings Attached," Jaroslow's dance-theatre collaboration with the composer Deirdre Murray, which has its première in the 92nd Street Y's spring dance festival, revisits the struggle of the era. As fragmentary voices from recorded interviews comment on the old-boy network, the tension between motherhood and career, and the tactile joy of playing an instrument, the all-female ensemble—five dancers and five string players (including a harpist) in forties gowns and suits—negotiate Murray's lush, driving score. The dancers march like rat-race workers, mimic ritualistic male handshakes, and then slide out of their heels and jackets and into acrobatic, forceful partnering. Strings suspended from the ceiling seem as if they might entangle the dancers, but when they are plucked they make music. The work is paired with another première, "FIDL for Six," set to klezmer music by Alicia Svigals. (Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-415-5552. April 2-3 and April 5 at 8 and April 6 at 2 and 7.)

"RICHARD DANIELS / 'THIS NIGHT'"

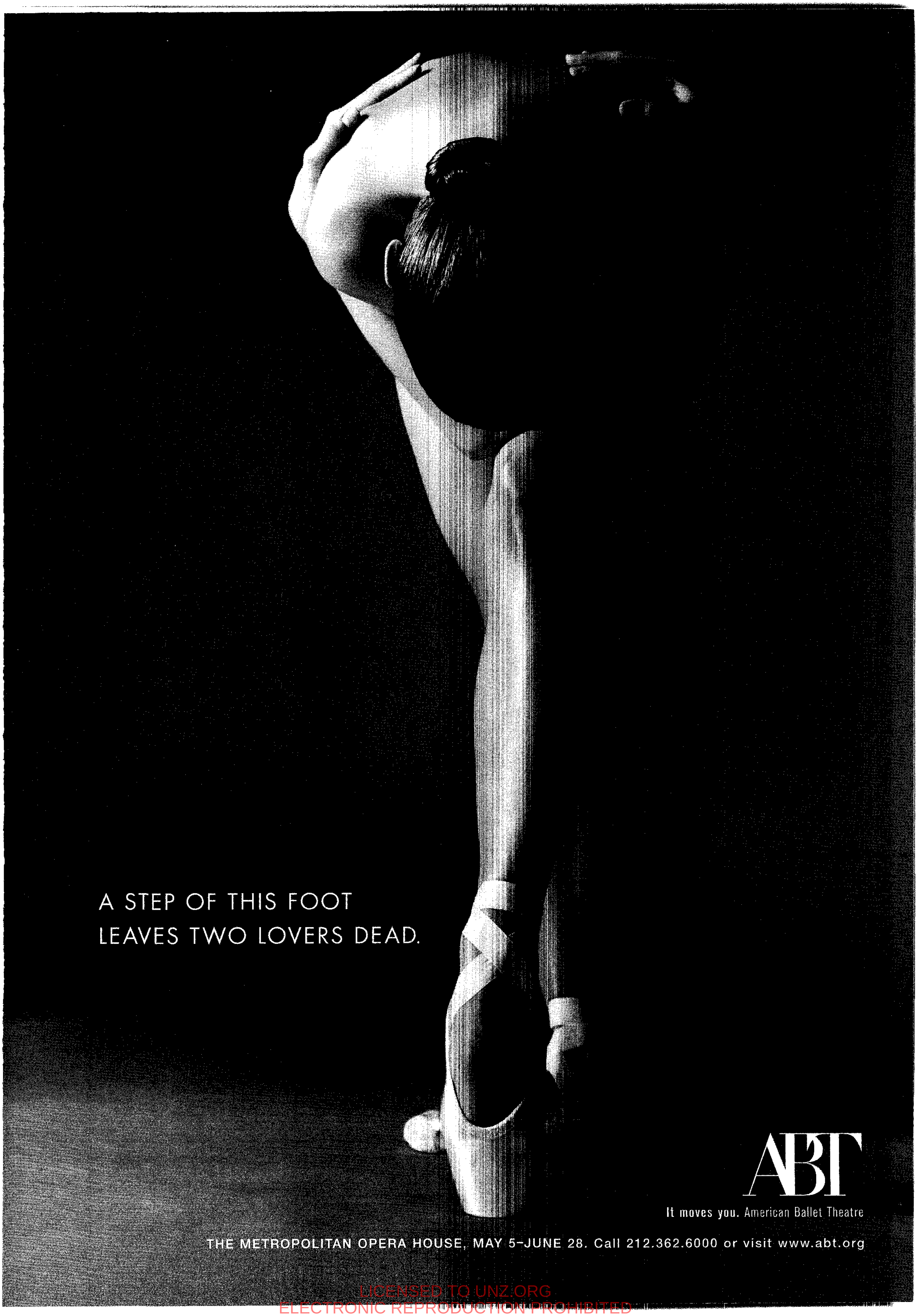
In "Wee Hours," a series of delicately drawn works set to nine well-chosen nocturnes (no Chopin), Richard Daniels's dancers filter onto the stage like light coming through a window, accompanied by the pianist Nurit Tilles. In one piece, the dancers move like sleepwalkers, half-awake in Paderewski's fitful night; in another, Dusan Tynek shows the pique of an unsleepy girl who dances to music by Manuel de Falla that ends on a petulant note—echoed by a spirited stamp of the foot. Most haunting is Regina Larkin's performance, set to Poulenc's Nocturne No. 4 in C Minor, which floats between dream and dread. Larkin moves with a gymnast's precision and a dancer's mastery of suspense, extending and stopping every limb just so, with angular yet smooth grace. Karen Young's costumes are colored in a shadowy palette drawn from James Abbott McNeill Whistler's "Nocturne" paintings. Daniels, who has lived with AIDS for twenty years, says the program's subject reflects "that moment, in a dark night, of waking up, or passing through—arriving at the dawn." The evening also includes two solos, "Cinder" and "Bonus Round," performed by Daniels. (Connelly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. 212-206-1515. April 2 at 7, April 4-5 at 8, and April 6 at 5.)

DÉJÀ DONNÉ

In the dance "In Bella Copia," or "Fair Copy," part of Dance Theatre Workshop's "Worldwide Works" series, the seven members of the group Déjà Donné (who come from four countries) riotously dismantle the set and their own costumes as they primp and preen, illustrating the vanity of self-consciousness. Jazzy, propulsive music keeps the action fast; two women make arches with their arms, legs, and bodies and slither through the apertures with astonishing rapidity. The tableaux stay playful even when the interchanges turn bullying, as when one dancer abruptly pulls down her partner's pants after a tender embrace. Directed by Simone Sandroni, who is Italian, and Lenka Flory, who is Czech. (Bessie Schönberg Theatre, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 3-5 at 7 and April 6 at 2.)

"I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S NOT BUTTER"

In Suarez Dance Theatre's new production, the choreographer Christine Suarez pays tribute to her Baton Rouge roots. In "Drunken Butterfly," a languid, jokey solo about her family's legacy of drinking, Suarez downs four beers as she glides and lofts in silvery pants and a sheer silken blouse. In "Samples," set at a nineteen-eighties débutante ball, five young people dance to Louisianan music. Suarez spikes the courtly interplay with local flavor, reading aloud from her great-grandmother's oral history and from a recipe for roux—the slow-cooked sauce thickened with butter and flour that serves as the base of bayou staples like gumbo and crawfish bisque and also as a metaphor for Suarez's Cajun background. (Williamsburg Art Nexus, 205 N. 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-599-7997. April 3-4 at 8 and April 5 at 3 and 8.)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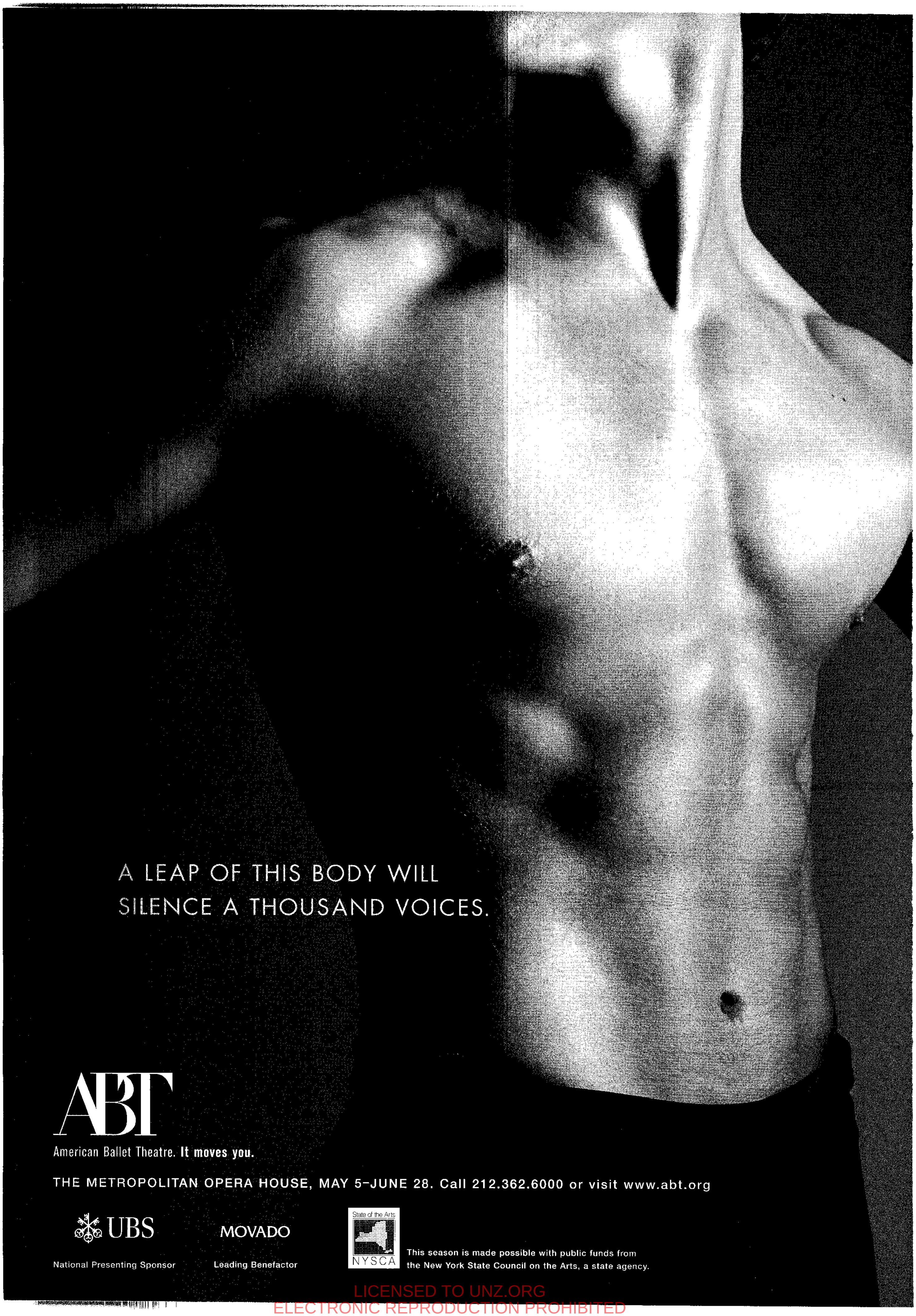
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NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

"24/7 JAZZ BROOKLYN"
Back when Brooklyn was a presence on the local jazz map, the borough had its own set of clubs where such local heroes as Max Roach and Randy Weston held court. Now, a grand monthlong festival will try to return the musical lustre to Kings County with concerts and shows from Crown Heights to Coney Island. Even if the less illustrious names outnumber the top-drawer acts (which include Dewey Redman, Randy Brecker, and Sonny Fortune), that doesn't diminish the appeal of what one hopes will become an annual event. (April 1-30. For details about shows, call 718-802-4488.)

AMERICAN SONGBOOK
April 2: **Lynn Ahrens** and **Stephen Flaherty** celebrate two decades as Broadway composers, with the help of **Audra MacDonald** and others. April 3: The Los Angeles-based singer-songwriter **Stew.** April 4: **Adam Guettel** has a pure theatrical bloodline: Mary Rodgers is his mother, Richard Rodgers his grandfather. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Shows at 8 and 10.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
The Institute kicks off its fourth Greek Festival with a performance by the Karaghiozis Shadow Puppet Theatre. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. April 4 at 8.) ♦ Petros Gaitanos offers an evening of *rembetika* (Greek blues dating from the nineteen-twenties) and *laiko* (folk songs from the second half of the twentieth century). (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. April 5 at 8.) ♦ The festival closes with a program of song and dance from Asia Minor. (Symphony Space. April 6 at 7.) (For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

DIASPORA SOUL
With his slide trumpet in hand and his heart filled with love for jazz, R. & B., Latin, and Jewish music, Steven Bernstein convenes Diaspora Soul. For a listener with itchy feet, a familiarity with the hora and the cha-cha could only be a plus. (Thalia Theatre, Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 4 at 8:30.)

BACK PORCH ROCKERS
A night of Cajun two-steps and waltzes. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, at 13th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. April 5 at 7:30.)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Under the wing of the Lincoln Center Jazz program, the **Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra** keeps alive the percolating sounds of Dizzy Gillespie, Mario Bauza, and Chico O'Farill (father of the A.L.J.O. leader, Arturo) among other Latin-jazz pioneers. Catching the ensemble in a dance club is perhaps the ideal way to experience their thrilling fusion of sophisticated orchestration and passionate rhythm work. (Copacabana, 560 W. 34th St. For more information, call 212-721-6500. April 5 at 9, with a dance lesson at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

ARLENE GROCERY
95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (212-358-1633)—April 2: Indianapolis's **Mab Lab** mixes up a wild brew of hip-hop, funk, and pop.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—April 1-2: The Montreal collective **godspeed you black emperor!** makes its first stop in New York in nearly three years. With three guitars, two basses, two drummers, a violin, a cello, and a projectionist, the group creates intensely dynamic instrumental music; pieces develop from spare whispers to stunning orchestral richness. Beautiful string lines evolve into percussion-driven crescendos, accompanied by a backdrop of grainy, haunting Super-8 footage. April 7: A night of state-of-the-art garage rock with the prolific guitars of New Zealand's **D4** and the tongue-in-cheek stylings of the **Electric Six.** April 8: The British Columbian **Hot Hot Heat** plays a jerky brand of melodic New Wave that hearkens back to vintage Joe Jackson, XTC, and the Cure. The front man Steve Bays uses his playfully helium-esque voice to deliver lyrics about bandages, pesticides, strangers, and the like.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—April 2-3: Formerly the lead singer of the critically acclaimed (though commercially anemic) cult band Grant Lee Buffalo, the singer-songwriter **Grant Lee Phillips** has opted for a more intimate, acoustic sound since going solo. April 5: The **Asylum Street Spankers,** an energetic collective of acoustic-blues-loving musicians from Austin, Texas.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—April 3: The minimalist composer and producer **Nobukazu Takemura,** joined here by the Tortoise drummer **John Herdon** and the Isotope 217 guitarist **Matt Lux.** April 4-5: The German quartet **Notwist** started as a heavy-metal band in the late eighties. Now they fuse electronic elements with traditional rock instruments to create albums that are as welcome and familiar as an old sweater. Their latest, "Neon Golden," is quiet, spacious, and eminently hummable. April 8: **Peter Galub** and the Annuals

TABLES FOR TWO

BLUE HILL
75 Washington Pl. (212-539-1776)—Blue Hill, which occupies the basement level of a town house near Washington Square, seems not to have regulars so much as adherents. There is something pleasantly cultish about the place: the old speakeasy entrance, the bartender who is said to be prejudiced against beer, the exceedingly chipper waitress, and the frequent invocation, among staff and patrons alike, of a character named Dan, as in "Dan would like you to try these poached shrimp" and "Dan's a nice guy." It helps to know that Dan is Dan Barber, the owner and co-chef, who named Blue Hill after his grandmother's farm in the Berkshires. It's true: Dan, once you meet him, does seem nice, but the important thing to understand about him is that he and his co-chef, Mike Anthony, like to work with produce that's in season, and that they do so with flair but not too much fuss.

At Blue Hill you used to be able to order a "mystery wine," a bargain bottle selected nightly by the sommelier and served in a burlap sack. Its identity was revealed only after everyone had knocked off the contents and hazarded some guesses. (Getting it right earned you nothing except "glory and satisfaction," Dan says.) They don't do this anymore (the wait staff groused), so now the tricks are just culinary: a thin green romaine-and-parsnip soup, served in a shot glass with a topping of Parmesan foam; a crabmeat lasagna, with a squadron of mussels in a sauce of mustard and spinach (a gloss on the classic crab cake); or squash ravioli, with what seems to be a lump of chestnut in each ravioli. There's always a selection of raw seafood, with adventurous accompaniments: Arctic char with, say, pea-shoot vinaigrette. Dan and Mike seem to be ardent poachers: two of the best entrées are salmon poached at a low temperature in duck fat, and a gamy skinned duck, poached in a spicy carrot stew. Both are airy, tender, and delicate, and come with funky broths.

Even the desserts call for close attention, if not participation: the other night the waitress made it known that Dan wanted the table to try something that combined three lemon things: a shot glass of lemon gelée, lemon-curd ice cream, and baked lemon curd. It was called a "lemon study," which sounded like work. Still, Dan is Dan, so lemon study it was. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $23-$28.)

—*Nick Paumgarten*

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AND: A calendar of New Yorker
events across the country

share the Old Office with **Franklin Bruno,** formerly of the Los Angeles indie-pop band Nothing Painted Blue, and the Coney Island native **Carol Lipnik.**

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—April 3: Joe Sumner—the son of Gordon Sumner, better known as Sting, the former lead singer of the Police—seems eager to prove that his band, **Fiction Plane,** is an alternative-rock force to be reckoned with in its own right. Owing more to the hook-laden pomp and circumstance of early U2 than to the sleek, sophisticated rock of Sumner's dad's band, Fiction Plane shows little interest in trading on the family legacy. Odd, then, that the very name Fiction Plane turns out to be a sly (or unintentional) anagram for Infant Police.

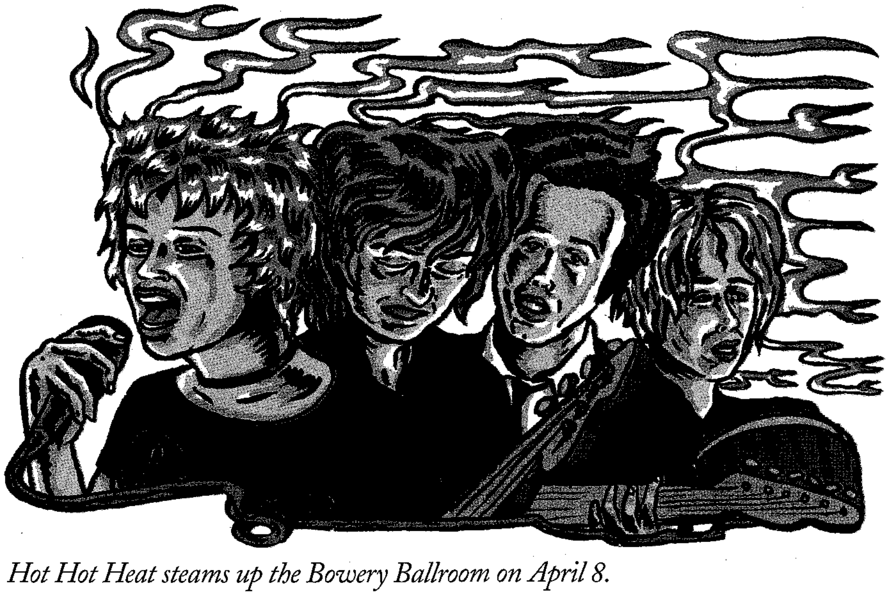
VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (212-777-7745)—April 3: The **Gourds,** out of Austin, Texas, stop by with their alternative honky-tonk. April 8: The perennial rock outsider **Jules Shear.**

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—April 3-4: **godspeed you black emperor!** (see the Bowery Ballroom). April 8: The charmingly enigmatic singer Chan Marshall, who goes by the name **Cat Power,** continues to torture critics and tease fans with her notoriously uneven live shows.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—April 3-5: **John Hicks's** fulsome piano and **Elise Wood's** delicate flute have been a winning combination for years now. Here they toughen up their sound by adding to the mix the saxophonist **Joe Lovano.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through April 6: The stylish Cuban diva **Albita.**



Hot Hot Heat steams up the Bowery Ballroom on April 8.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and through April 12, the Broadway veteran **James Naughton.** On Mondays the café is home to **Woody Allen** and the **Eddie Davis New Orleans Jazz Band.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Loston Harris** is in attendance.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through April 12: The composer **Michel Legrand,** the lyricist **Alan Bergman,** and the vocalist **Patti Austin**—all aces in their chosen fields—come together for an evening of song.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through April 6: The vibraphone owes its existence on the jazz playing field to the legendary Lionel Hampton, who died last year at age ninety-four. Saluting the irrepressible entertainer and Swing Era giant will be the veteran vibraphonist **Terry Gibbs** and his quintet. If they don't play "Flying Home," demand your money back. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—April 5: The **Frank Lacy** quintet. An assured, often excitable trombonist with no patience for musical boundaries, Frank Lacy has a bag of tricks that's brimming with R. & B., modal jazz, blues, and a host of other mix-and-match genres.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The Chilean expat **Claudia Acuña** (here with her quintet through April 6) is one of a growing number of Latin-American singers lately making their mark on the local jazz scene. Dining.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—April 6: **Fred Hersch** and **Norma Winstone.** He may be as ubiquitous as she's undeservedly obscure, but a duo featuring the pianist Hersch and the British vocalist Winstone is still guaranteed to provide exquisite music. They each share an affinity for the delicate corners and poetic nuances of a tune, as displayed on their new album, "Songs & Lullabies."

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—April 2-3: John Zorn calls in a whole cadre of plugged-in colleagues to convene his **Electric Masada** project. April 5: The indomitable modernist **Anthony Braxton** brings his alto saxophone and as much of his arsenal of wind instruments as he wishes onto the stage to meet trumpeter and fellow-freethinker **Wadada Leo Smith.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through April 6: The **Heath Brothers.** Bebop doesn't get any more elegant or spirited than in the hands of the three Heath Brothers: the saxophonist Jimmy, the bassist Percy, and the drummer Albert (or Tootie, as he's been known for decades). Authenticity and expertise combine to form a classic ensemble, fleshed out here by Jeb Patton on piano. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—**"Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting,"** a ravishing and keenly illuminating show, marshalls great paintings to demonstrate a miracle in art history: the rebirth of Spanish Baroque painting in nineteenth-century Paris, brought about by Édouard Manet. It was as electrifying a development in its way as the Renaissance rediscovery of antiquity. Manet's appropriation of Velázquez's crystalline, rhetorical realism transformed French painting and, beyond that, set an example of stylistic resourcefulness that has informed artistic innovation ever since. At one end of its two-century leap, the show is augmented with works by Zurbarán, Murillo, and other Spaniards, and, at the other, by relevant figures from Delacroix to Sargent. But the summit meeting of Velázquez and Manet dominates. Saying that this show is greater than the sum of its parts is saying a mouthful, since the parts give as much pleasure as a person can stand. Through June 8. ♦ A mid-career retrospective of the photographs and video portraits of the German photographer Thomas Struth. Through May 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—Even what's wrong with **"Matisse Picasso,"** the magnificent show that deploys a hundred and thirty-three works by the twin godheads of modern painting, is revelatory. It is a double-barrelled blast of an exhibition with a popgun thesis: that Picasso and Matisse goaded and influenced each other. So do most artistic contemporaries. In any case, trying to absorb fine curatorial points of comparison between such stunners as Picasso's "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon" and Matisse's "Bathers with a Turtle" is like trying to check the oil in a speeding truck. The show's payoff comes from the jagged, overwhelming sense it gives of how different the two were as men and artists—as antithetical, and evenly matched, as Ali and Frazier. Through May 19. (Open Thursdays, Sundays, and Mondays, 10 to 5, and Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 9.)

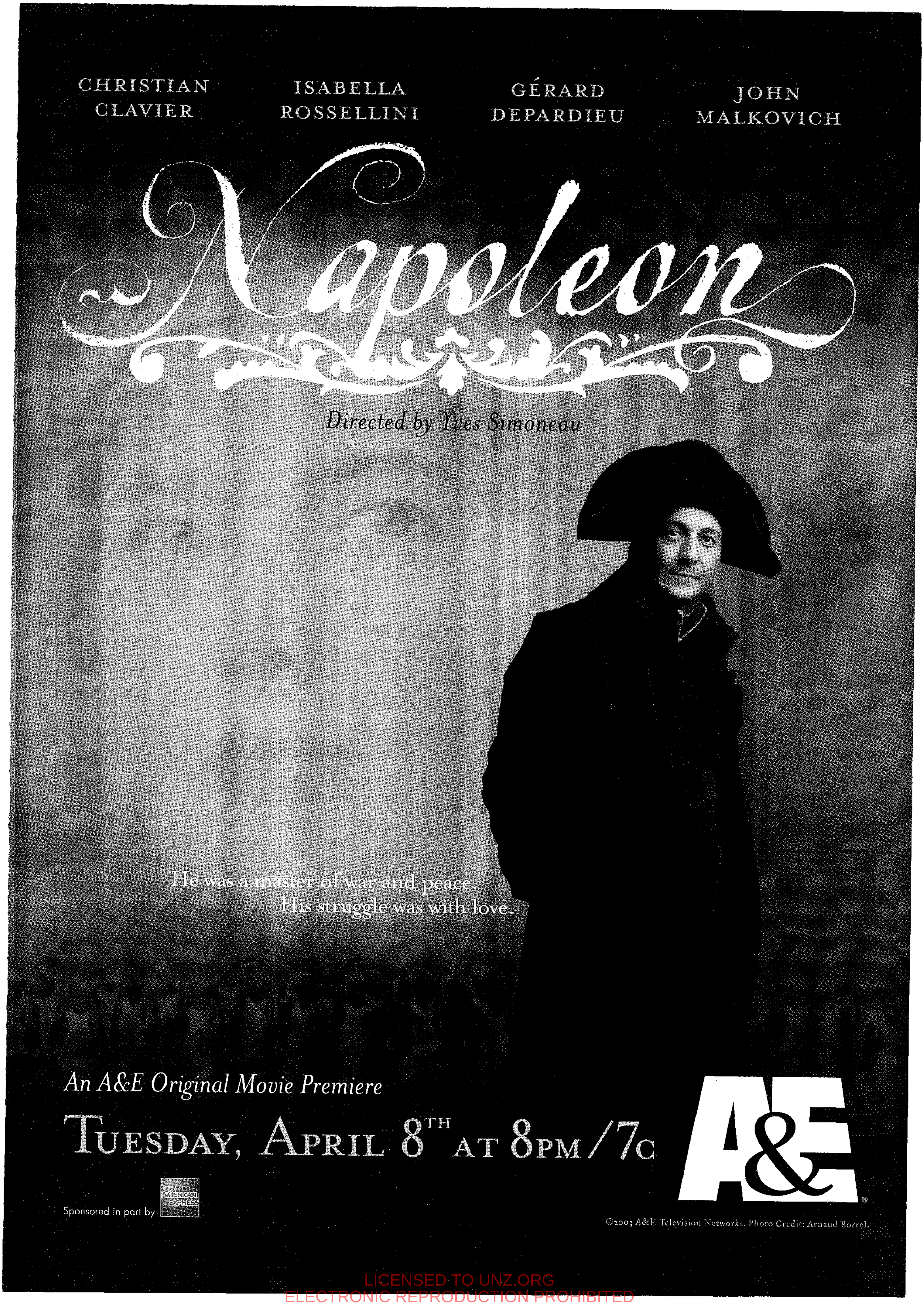
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle"** attempts an apotheosis of the artist. Frank Lloyd Wright's bobbin turns cornucopia, brimming with the fruits of Barney's epic nine-year "Cremaster" project: all five spectacular, recondite films projected amid outlandish objects, photographs, drawings, decorative elements such as flags and artificial turf, and, along the ramp, runnels of congealed Vaseline. It's oddly, numbingly earnest. There's nothing fake about Barney. Would that there were. A touch of the charlatan (or of humor, God forbid) would prove that he cares what other people think. As it is, the show is seamlessly hermetic: a solipsist's houseparty. Barney's achievement appears to be a richly upholstered dead end. But to miss this landmark event is unthinkable. If not a major artist, he is certainly a major case. Through June 11. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Scanning: The Aberrant Architectures of Diller + Scofidio,"** a retrospective featuring the designs of the husband-and-wife team. Through May 25. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)— **"St. Adolf-Giant-Creation: The Art of Adolf Wölfli"** is an astounding retrospective of the Swiss psychotic genius who lived and worked in Waldau, a psychiatric hospital, for thirty-five years until his death, in 1930, at the age of sixty-six. Wölfli was not just a great outsider artist, given to delirious cosmic visions, but a great artist, period, whose early, large drawings are some of the best graphic works of modern times. Reproduction doesn't serve the drawings well: their densely packed but never congested compositions make magic with eloquent textures and tonal nuances. There's fascination aplenty in Wölfli's themes, which blend religion, sex, language, musical notation, arithmetic, and geography, but his work's aesthetic grandeur is a revelation. Through May 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS
548 W. 22nd St. (212-989-5566)—Robert Whitman, one of the pioneers of performance art, lacks the name recognition of his peers Allan Kaprow and

DAVID SANDLIN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GÉRARD DEPARDIEU
JOHN MALKOVICH
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Directed by Yves Simoneau
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BATTLE PLANS

Conquering "Napoleon" on A&E

One of the great ironies about historical fame is that subsequent scrutiny—coming years or centuries later—often fails to reveal anything new about the person. Indeed, his or her personality and exploits have likely become blurred in a misty, albeit admiring, haze. For all the wealth of contemporary accounts and expert analysis of Napoleon, he seems to have become less appreciated or understood as time goes by.

Nonetheless, Napoleon remains one of the most compelling figures in history, with literally thousands of biographies, memoirs, poems, and films devoted to the man and his times. His battlefield chess moves continue to intrigue military historians. Brando played him in the 1954 film, "Désirée." Even the Swedish group ABBA made his ultimate demise at Waterloo their first offensive on the pop music market. Yet, for all the ink and passion devoted to Napoleon, the world has been left with only a vague glimmer of this notable titan. His tricorn hat, his small stature, his dogged perseverance in the face of obstacles are merely trace elements that comprise a caricature rather than a nuanced portrait of the man.

A&E's "Napoleon," a movie airing April 8th at 8 P.M./7 P.M. Central seeks to compose that more detailed portrait. It's a timely look at both politics and passion. "I hope that after seeing the movie, the audience has the impression of knowing Napoleon, the man; that they have a familiarity that transcends his historical legend," notes director Yves Simoneau.

Small Screen, Huge Production

The flexibility of television makes it an ideal format for the story of Napoleon's epic-scaled life. Notes producer and cast member Gérard Depardieu, "Television is the only medium that allows the creation of a saga, or the unfolding of the destiny of a man like Napoleon." Locations for the major motion picture production included France, the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Morocco, Canada, and the remote island of St. Helena. With an army of actors and production personnel, 4,500 period costumes, and a cavalry of horses, the making of "Napoleon" may have resembled one of the wily Corsican's legendary European campaigns. The all-star cast includes Isabella Rossellini as Joséphine, John Malkovich as Talleyrand, Depardieu as Fouche, Anouk Aimée as Napoleon's mother, Letiza Bonaparte, and Christian Clavier as Napoleon.

Writer's Block: Courting the Devil

A writer faces many potential challenges in the creative process—an elusive muse, a complicated plot, some tricky dialogue. But Didier Decoin, the screenwriter of "Napoleon," confronted something unique: animosity. "I had a very personal problem," says Decoin. "I could not stand Napoleon! This

"Napoleon" airs on A&E on April 8th at 8 P.M. / 7 P.M. Central.
For more information, visit AETV.com.

megalomaniac hungry for power, this little dictator, this murderer of a million French people! It was one of the rare subjects of discord between me and my wife, as she is a true admirer of Napoleon."

To ease domestic tensions, Decoin decided on a strategy to do battle with his nemesis. "I told myself, in a kind of Machiavellian way, that it could be a chance to expose the ogre." As fate would have it, Bonaparte seduced the screenwriter. "It is inevitable to feel fascinated by out-of-the-ordinary men, even awful ones. It's like being fascinated by the devil. Yet," he says, "I literally fell in love with Napoleon. I discovered a character some light-years away from everything I had imagined—a genius about whose impressiveness, modernity, and also humanity I had no knowledge." Decoin's screenplay reflects this sense of discovery.

Channeling Napoleon

"Napoleon" is based on the acclaimed four-volume biography by French novelist and historian Max Gallo, in which the history of the era is drafted inside the head of Napoleon himself. As such, few scenes in the production do not include the little Emperor.

French actor Clavier who portrays Napoleon remembered fondly the incredible stories of this mythical figure related by his father when he was a boy. To become Napoleon for several months proved a daunting task for him. "The director told me two things about the character of Napoleon. First, that Napoleon was one of the best intellects of his time. Secondly, that he was a man who could accept betrayal, but not disappointment."

And like Napoleon himself, Clavier and the entire company had grand ambitions. "We tried to distance ourselves from the mythic Napoleon created and memorialized for propaganda purposes, and from the caricature that had emerged from this legend," he says. "We wanted no part of that nearly deified historical figure on the one hand, nor of the quick-tempered and ridiculous little despot, the cold and criminal monster on the other."

A Woman of a Certain Age

Of all the campaigns waged by Napoleon, perhaps the best-chronicled is his pursuit of and marriage to Joséphine, one of history's most famous, and most controversial, older women. Six years Napoleon's senior, the Empress Joséphine survived the ultimate end of The Reign of Terror when she received a last-minute reprieve on the way to the guillotine. A woman of style, Joséphine cut her hair before narrowly escaping her execution to deny spectators the joy of seeing her locks crudely trimmed on the block.

Actress Isabella Rossellini jumped at the chance to tackle this challenging role and explore the woman behind the reputation. "How could a man like Bonaparte have fallen in love with a woman who wasn't exceptional?" she asks. "I see her as the first modern woman."

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No extension or change of trip dates permitted once Sponsor has confirmed trip dates. Trip is subject to air/ground travel availability, hotel availability, holiday and blackout dates (including winery closure dates) and all other prize and travel restrictions, as applicable. Grand-Prize Winner and his/her travel companion must be 21 years of age or older, travel together on the same itinerary and must have valid travel documents prior to departure. Airline carrier's regulations and conditions and any other restrictions and blackout dates may apply to Prize travel. Grand-Prize Winner's travel *companion must sign and return a Release of Liability/Publicity Release prior to the issuance of travel documents. All prizes will be awarded.* No transfer, substitution or cash equivalent for any prizes, except at Sponsor's sole discretion, due to prize unavailability for any reason, and only then for a prize of greater or equal value. 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Crowds in the Great Hall, underneath a video portrait of Anna Grefe, part of the Thomas Struth retrospective at the Met.

Claes Oldenberg (whose "happenings" curator Lynne Cooke characterizes as literal and louche, respectively). This show opens with a series of films projected onto everyday objects—a grocery bag, a shower—that prefigure Tony Oursler's projections onto mist, smoke, and glass façades. One voyeuristic piece from 1963 involving a window, foliage, and footage of a nude woman might appear derivative of Duchamp's "Étant Donnés" if it didn't precede the more notorious assemblage by three years. But the highlight is an octagonal installation alternating mirrored panels with projections of Whitman's films from the sixties and seventies, collapsing the images and the viewer into a single, mystical merry-go-round. Through June. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

MORGAN LIBRARY

29 E. 36th St. (212-685-0008)—The Bronx may have a world-class zoo and botanical garden, but this spring there's a rival display in Manhattan: **"Picturing Natural History,"** a show of drawings, illuminated manuscripts, and printed books from the permanent collection. Some are flights of fancy, like the fifteenth-century Italian horse whose body parts host signs of the zodiac, but most are meticulously drawn from nature, including an ink study of a dour dromedary attributed to Bellini. Through May 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5; Fridays, 10:30 to 8; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; and Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

WALTER GAY

Gay (1856-1937), a wealthy, talented American expatriate of Sargent's generation, painted lovely portraits of privilege by concentrating not on the well-to-do but on the places where they might have sat for him. This small show includes plein-air sketches made in the gardens of country châteaux and views of comfortable drawing rooms—including that of his friend Edith Wharton. Everywhere you look, chandeliers, sconces, and parquet floors shine with precise, relaxed painterliness. Gay's take on domesticity is a long way from say, Gordon Matta-Clark's, but it's quietly compelling. Through April 12. (James Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-535-5767.)

Short List

JULIE HEFFERNAN

Littlejohn, 41 E. 57th St. 212-980-2323.
Through April 19.

JOHN WALKER

Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550.
Through April 26.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JAMES ESBER

In this supremely painterly show (only a third of which is painting), Esber plays with plasticity—malleability, torsion, mutation. But he's also interested in plastic figurines, superhero dolls, and cutesy tchotchkes. Big-eyed Hummel orphans and He-Man action figures glom onto one another in Esber's paintings, and his signature Plasticine wall-works, applied directly to the wall, read as luscious impastos, but the gestural verve remains. Through April 19. (P.P.O.W, 555 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044.)

ÖYVIND FAHLSTRÖM

Fahlström (1928-76) was a studio-mate of Rauschenberg and Johns, a fixture in "happenings" of the sixties, and a painter, poet, and social critic. He remains an artist's artist—a beloved figure that few know. This bracing, entertaining show includes the Swedish-Brazilian émigré's complete output of prints and multiples, some forty examples of graphic ingenuity, rampant cheekiness, and radical politics. Vietnam, corporate scandal, Picasso, and the gross national product of Brazil are a few of his subjects, and he favors jigsaw puzzles, money, and doodling for his forms. Through April 5. (Feigen Contemporary, 535 W. 20th St. 212-929-0500.)

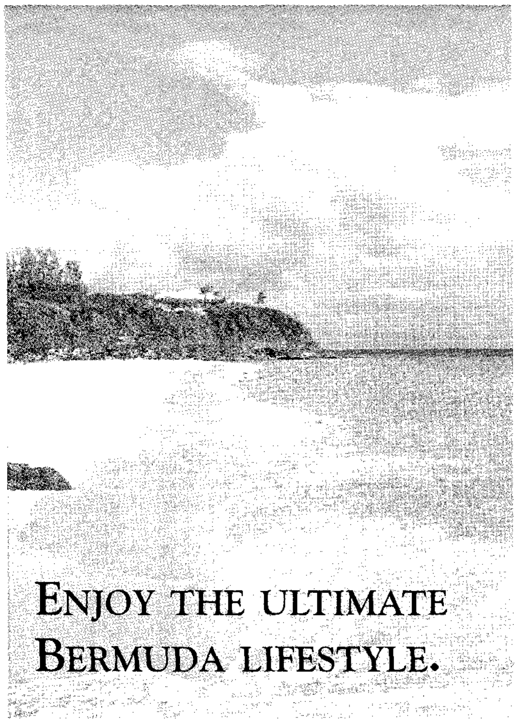
WILLIAM WEGMAN

The dog man paints, pretty gloriously. He has done it before, teasing tiny, fantastic images from poured and loosely brushed fields of paint. Now he starts with old picture postcards, gluing them here and there to wood panels and then extending their images in paint to create swirling topographies where Miami annexes Lisbon and Colmar and a Paris café might share a coastline with Norway. The big, handsome paintings are weirdly convincing at first glance; they break down into absurdity piecemeal, hilariously. One could spend days looking at this stuff. Small pictures provide bite-size delight. In one, details of a Maine landscape become parts of two dogs, an elk, and a duck the size of a mountain. Through April 12. (Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337.)

TOM WESSELMANN

The other Pop artist, whose decorative sexpot nudes fell between modern-artiness and vernacular sass, has expanded his neither-here-nor-thereness to take in abstract, painted aluminum reliefs that are like friskier Frank Stellas—with the odd erect nipple thrown in for old time's sake. Bright synthetic colors feel desperate to please. The show includes some new nudes, with still-lifes and tropical sunsets, on canvas. One quotes a painting by Matisse, unwisely inviting a comparison that does not favor Wesselmann. Through May 10. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)

LARRY FINK



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YUN-FEI JI
Yun-Fei's dense, fragile paintings are made with mineral pigments on nearly translucent mulberry paper, and titles like "The Wedding Ballad" and "The Elegant Gathering" suggest a tranquil rehearsal of classical Chinese subjects. But wrecked cars hide amid the swirl of mountains and rivers; ghouls and corpses poke out from behind pine trees; and lascivious, emaciated old men materialize out of the mists. Nevertheless, despite the restless traffic in visual shock, Yun-Fei's scrolls maintain a calm, even meditative surface. Through April 12. (Pratt Manhattan Gallery, 144 W. 14th St. 212-647-7778.)

Short List

ELIZABETH MURRAY
Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-421-3292. Through April 19.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

STEPHANIE BROOKS
The artist's laugh-out-loud wordplay recalls the work of Kay Rosen. (Rosen is famous for works such as "Sheep in Wolf's Clothing," which consists of the two-word block "**VIRGINia WOOLf.**") Some pieces here are visual puns that only imply language, like the three wooden blocks in the precise sizes and shapes of a checkbook, a notepad, and a Palm Pilot. (Brooks' work also riffs on the serial sequences of minimalism.) Others deliver a verbal punch line, like the tidy row of renamed crayons (orange is now "visceral," red "heartache," and purple "compensation for the inadequacies of the past"). Through April 26. (Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

"EXTRA"
The Swiss Institute's group show gathers what appears to be a motley sitcom set on a modish but jerry-built spaceship. Michelin man with Afro? Check. The Village People sculpted in gold-and-white papier-mâché? Check. Tattooed, taxidermied pig? Robotic dogs? All present and accounted for. Amidst the goofy glam you'll also find an unplugged fan and a pair of paint-stained shoes. Swiss artists predominate, of course, with the art stars Roman Signer, Sylvie Fleury, and the duo of Peter Fischli and David Weiss joined by others less well known here. Through April 26. (495 Broadway. 212-925-2035.)

Short List

ANA PATRICIA PALACIOS
Latin Collector, 153 Hudson St. 212-334-7813. Through April 12.

PHOTOGRAPHY

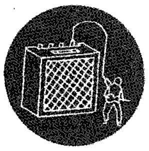
LYNN DAVIS
Never shy about tackling extremely large subjects with her camera—Greenland's icebergs, Egypt's pyramids, the Hoover Dam—Davis has turned her roving eye to China. A series of the doomed Three Gorges on the Yangtze River is uncharacteristically moody, but pictures of steps leading to a cemetery, on the edge of the Gobi Desert in northwestern China, are vintage Davis: stark, austere, and toned to perfection with sepia, selenium, or gold. The prints themselves are overwhelmingly large, and, while the Buddhas, pagodas, ruins, and skyscrapers recall her earlier work, they're so beautiful you may want to jump on the next plane out. Through May 3. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070.)

CHEMA MADOZ
This Spaniard shows a strain of formal Surrealism not often seen these days. Madoz creates unlikely constructions that are surprisingly funny. A hard-boiled egg shares a crack with its eggcup, a melting ice cube is neatly tied with a bow, and a burned-out match seems to be on fire, but it's the perfectly formed knots in the wooden board on which it rests that create the effect. His work avoids preciousness through its spare elegance and beautifully printed oddity. Through April 19. (Milo, 552 W. 24th St. 212-414-0370.)

MIGUEL RIO BRANCO
Images of intricately carved doorways, bloodied knives on cobblestone streets, and sweaty embraces are projected in rapid succession onto a simple white sheet that bisects the main room of the Aperture Foundation's gallery. Eerie, clanging music and a jittery projection of pornographic stills on a side wall complete the installation and create a vaguely menacing evocation of the Brazilian's Latin-American-gothic aesthetic. There is also a set of large prints—a lion set to jump through a flaming hoop, two boxers exercising, a slain bull's severed horn—that are so decadently colored they'll make you marvel that they are photographs at all. Through May 8. (Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 212-505-5555.)

"FLESH TONES"
A mixture of prurience and reverence crowds the walls in this survey of the nude in photographic history. From an early Steichen photogravure, George Platt Lynes's beefcake, Irving Penn's voluptuous women, and Harry Callahan's Eleanor to Richard Avedon's Nureyev, Sally Mann's kids, and Nan Goldin's friends, unclothed bodies allegorize, transgress, or simply play around. Emmet Gowin's hauntingly beautiful picture of his wife, nude and folded into a window frame, strikes all these chords at once. John O'Reilly's montages of soldiers, saints, and erections are both precious and shocking. A striking,

POP NOTES



LEFT OF ECCENTRIC
As the lead singer and songwriter of Pavement, Stephen Malkmus yoked twisty melodies to arcane lyrics and bewitched a generation of college students in the process. On **"Pig Lib"** (Matador), Malkmus and his backing band the Jicks return in force; with frequent time changes and often unhinged singing, Malkmus sounds more than ever like a Captain Beefheart for the wheatgrass crowd. The songs are a mixed bag, ranging from wistful portraits that play up his debt to Ray Davies to shambling slices of surrealistic comedy that play up his debt to himself.

Vic Chesnutt, raised in central Georgia, paralyzed after a drunk-driving accident at eighteen, and then taken up as a cause célèbre by famous friends, is one of pop music's most emotional singers: he can do anguish and resignation better than almost anyone. He's also a fearless songwriter whose lyrics teeter with cerebral vocabulary, remaining upright only as a result of their lovely melodies. **"Silver Lake"** (New West), Chesnutt's latest album, is one of his rootsiest—it sounds like a pine forest at dusk—and strongest efforts. Who else could write a ballad from the point of view of a Styrofoam cooler ("I'm a cheap, spent shell / and a biohazard / grind me up then mail me away / maybe transmogrified / I'll be satisfied"), let alone grant that cooler dignity? Elsewhere, Chesnutt delivers a glacial, falsetto monologue as a court eunuch and reminisces about his own post-paralysis hospitalization. Harmonies figure prominently, especially on the gospel-tinged closer, "In My Way, Yes."

Malkmus and Chesnutt are both willful oddballs; Daniel Johnston is something else. A diagnosed manic-depressive, he has made a career out of singing cracked odes to ghosts (especially Casper the Friendly Ghost), movie monsters, and the reticulations of the human heart. **"Fear Myself"** (Gammon) is a rather polished portrait of the artist—Mark Linkous, of the rock band Sparklehorse, has dressed up a set of raw-nerve demos as orchestral pop. Singing in a threadbare voice that threatens to unravel altogether, cramming words into verses like he's packing a bag to run away, Johnston somehow manages to mine universal pathos from his idiosyncracies.

—*Ben Greenman*

multiply exposed image by Michael Spano gets to the point of all this nakedness by showing two people engaged in various moments in the confusing mess of sex. Through April 19. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-989-7600.)

Short List

GAIL ALBERT-HALABAN
Meyerowitz, 120 Eleventh Ave. 212-414-2770. Through April 12.
RALPH EUGENE MEATYARD
Pace/MacGill, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through April 19.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
April 3 at 10 A.M.: African, American Indian, and Oceanic art works from the collection of Russell B. Aitken. A bronze plaque from Benin, possibly depicting the warrior king Esigie (estimated to sell for approximately two hundred thousand dollars), is the highlight of the sale. ♦ April 3 at 2: Sculpture and wildlife art, also from the Aitken collection. ♦ April 4 at 10 A.M.: Silver trophies, vintage firearms and armor, and a library of sporting material, in the third of three Aitken sales. ♦ April 8 at 2: Works of literature, including a first-edition, first-printing copy (from 1925) of "The Great Gatsby" and a 1632 second-folio edition of Shakespeare, along with the last of three installments of the detective-fiction library of Dr. Richard M. Lackritz (featuring books by Dick Francis, Ian Fleming, Patricia Highsmith, and others). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)
DOYLE
April 2 at 10 A.M.: Furniture, paintings, and decorations. ♦ April 8 at 10 A.M.: Jewelry, watches, and objects of virtu. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)
SWANN
April 3 at 10:30 A.M.: Autographs, letters, and manuscripts from a variety of figures in American and European history and the arts, including Freud, Lincoln, Remington, Shostakovich, and William Hooper (a letter to a friend written four days after Hooper, a delegate to the Continental Congress from North Carolina, signed the Declaration of Independence). (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Thanks to current events, the Met's revival of **"Nabucco"**—whose title character is a Babylonian king with delusions of divinity—returns with uncomfortable resonance. Elijah Moshinsky's 2001 staging of Verdi's first big hit is scaled along the lines of a De Mille epic, and the young American soprano Andrea Gruber makes a tremendous impression as the scheming Abigaille, whose bel-canto fury she handles with alarming ease. Her nemeses include Wendy White's touching Fenena, Francisco Casanova's stout but sweet Ismaele, and Samuel Ramey's imposing, if vocally worn, Zaccaria. (Lado Ataneli replaces Frederick Burchinal in the title role.) This rousing stuff is mother's milk to the Met's orchestra and chorus, and when the audience clamors for a reprise of the Jews' patriotic anthem, "Va, pensiero," only a spoilsport would criticize the conductor James Levine for giving in. (April 2 and April 8 at 8 and April 5 at 1:30.) ♦ Elijah Moshinsky's 1993 production of **"Ariadne auf Naxos"** returns to the Met, with Deborah Voigt, Natalie Dessay, Susanne Mentzer, Richard Margison, Nathan Gunn, Wolfgang Brendel, and Waldemar Kmentt leading the cast; James Levine conducts. (April 3 at 8.) ♦ Plácido Domingo leads the cast in a revival of Otto Schenk's production of **"Parsifal,"** with Violeta Urmana, Falk Struckmann, Nikolai Putilin, René Pape, and Eric Halfvarson; Valery Gergiev. (April 4 and April 7 at 6:30.) ♦ **"La Bohème,"** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Angela Maria Blasi, Frank Lopardo, and Mariusz Kwiecien; Julius Rudel. (April 5 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)
NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Those who discovered Mark Adamo's **"Little Women"** via last season's PBS broadcast from Houston Grand Opera may be surprised by Rhoda Levine's austere and measured new staging for City Opera, which débuted at Glimmerglass Opera last summer. Adamo's sure gift for dramatic continuity and the lyrical line has always been apparent, but, by replacing Houston's doll-house décor with costumes and lighting inspired by the muted northern colors of the nineteenth-century Danish artist Vilhelm Hammershoi, Levine helps to streamline the energies of an opera based more in emotional turmoil than in dramatic conflict. It is also cleanly acted and (mostly) well sung, with Jennifer Dudley's star turn as Jo complemented by fine work from, among others, Jennifer Rivera, Chad Shelton, and Jake Gardner; George Manahan conducts with his usual efficiency. (April 2 and April 8 at 7:30 and April 5 at 1:30.) ♦ James Robinson's inventive 2001 production of **"La Bohème,"** set on the eve of the First World War, returns with Angela Marambio, Adina Aaron, Gerard Powers, and Michael Corvino in the leading roles; Gerald Steichen. (April 4 at 8.) ♦ **"Carmen,"** with Katharine Goeldner (in the title role), Nicolle Foland, Carl Tanner, and Paulo Szot; Joseph Rescigno. (April 5 at 8.) ♦ City Opera, still on its longtime Handel binge, stages its first performances of **"Flavio,"** a romantic tragicomedy set in Britain's mythical past, in a production directed by Chas Raider-Shieber. With Jennifer Aylmer, Maria Zifchak, David Walker, and Bejun Mehta among others; George Manahan. (April 6 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-307-4100.)
AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA: "ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA"
A sensational flop when it premièred, Barber's 1966 Shakespeare opera, which was commissioned to

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High Society
CELESTE HOLM · JOHN LUND
LOUIS ARMSTRONG
GENE KELLY · MITZI GAYNOR · KAY KENDALL · TAINA ELG
LES GIRLS
FRED ASTAIRE CYD CHARISSE
Silk Stockings
Fred ASTAIRE · Eleanor POWELL
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BOOK CURRENTS

Before Oil, Coal

RICHARD McGUIRE

As the hunt for alternative fuels intensifies, the world finds itself looking to the past to secure the future. Barbara Freese's **COAL: A HUMAN HISTORY** (Perseus) offers an unflinching history of life in the mines: "Sometimes I sing when I've light, but not in the dark," an eight-year-old mineworker told a parliamentary commission on child labor in the eighteen-forties. During a visit to Manchester, Alexis de Tocqueville found that sulfurous smoke reduced the sun to a flattened "disc without rays." But in the industrial revolution, coal was also seen as "our species' salvation." It still provides more than half of the electricity in the United States, and, according to some estimates, ninety new coal-fired power plants are in planning stages.

Bituminous veins in Appalachia may have fed industry, but strip mining has also caused erosion, stream pollution, and mud slides. In 1945, the governor of Ohio, Frank Lausche, called the practice "sheer butchery." **TO SAVE THE LAND AND PEOPLE** (Chapel Hill), by Chad Montrie, chronicles resistance to surface mining in Appalachia, as companies left behind gutted communities that were no more than "rural slums."

The average American mining town lost between twenty-five and fifty per cent of its population after the Second World War, Ed Dougert notes in **THE BLACK LAND** (Schuylkill Living). His photographic essay on Pennsylvania's anthracite region collects scenes from the scarred country: a shack built of Hercules gunpowder crates, spindly white trees stitched into a blackened hillside. In an empty park, a valentine-shaped sign with "We Love Centralia" hangs on a tree. Centralia's residents had to evacuate their town in 1980, fleeing a coal fire that had burned for twenty years and, even now, is expected to continue for fifty more.

—Lauren Porcaro

open the new Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center, is finally becoming better known for its memorable lyricism and dignified dramatics. The A.C.O.'s performance of the revised score, not heard in New York for nearly thirty years, comes with Carol Vaness and Gregg Baker in the leading roles; Steven Sloane conducts. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 6 at 3.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Mstislav Rostropovich pulls down the curtain on "Slava and Friends," his festive seventeen-day stint with the Philharmonic, by introducing another of his talented young protégés, the French cellist Xavier Phillips, who plays the solo part in Prokofiev's Sinfonia Concertante (which the composer wrote for Rostropovich, his dear friend, in 1951); two more Prokofiev works (the "Russian Overture" and a suite from "Romeo and Juliet") complete the program. (April 3 at 7:30 and April 4-5 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

ORCHESTRAS AT CARNEGIE HALL
April 2 at 8: Valery Gergiev conducts the Kirov Orchestra in music by Wagner, Verdi, and Tchaikovsky (the Fifth Symphony). ♦ April 7 at 8: The Philadelphia Orchestra's latest program, conducted by Roberto Abbado, offers Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto (with Alfred Brendel), the most intensely serious of his five, in between jaunty, satirical Russian works by Schnittke and Shostakovich (the First Symphony). ♦ April 8 at 7: The singers and players of Bach Collegium Japan—the country's preëminent early-music ensemble—perform the "St. Matthew Passion," conducted by their founder and music director, Masaaki Suzuki. (212-247-7800.)

NEW YORK COLLEGIUM
Heinrich Biber, a comparatively recent enthusiasm of the early-music movement, receives a special tribute on the closing concert of Andrew Parrott's first season as the Collegium's music director, who leads the first performance since 1674 of the Salzburg composer's luxuriantly scored "Missa Christi Resurgentis." (Church of St. Vincent Ferrer, Lexington Ave. at 66th St. 212-717-9246. April 4 at 8.)

TALLIS SCHOLARS: "FLEMISH SPRING"
The renowned English chamber choir, presented by Miller Theatre, offers a bouquet of motets and anthems by Josquin, Lassus, Gombert, and others. (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 212-854-7799. April 5 at 8.)

RECITALS

NEW YORK WOLPE FESTIVAL
The oboist Susan Barrett and others offer a program that includes Wolpe's Sonata for Oboe and Piano (written for a treasured colleague, the oboist Josef Marx) as well as works by two respected disciples of the modernist master, Raoul Pleskow and Charles Wuorinen. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. April 2 at 8.)

ELEKTRA CHAMBER PLAYERS
A new piano trio (including the violinist Kurt Nikkanen) makes its début with a Greek-themed program including music by Stravinsky, Skalkottas, Bartók ("Contrasts," with the clarinettist David Krakauer), and George Tsontakis (a New York première). (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. April 2 at 8.)

"INTERPRETATIONS" SERIES: DAN JOSEPH / MARTIN BRESNICK & LISA MOORE
The World Music Institute's adventurous series of multimedia concerts continues with another concert split. In the first half, Joseph, a composer influenced by minimalism and Near Eastern folk music, plays two of his new pieces for hammered dulcimer (with the violinist Tom Chiu, the harpsichordist Jed Distler, and others sitting in); the evening concludes with the pianist Lisa Moore, and friends, performing two works by Bresnick (including "For the Sexes," a solo piano work accompanied by computer-animated images from

the works of William Blake). (Merkin Concert Hall. 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. April 3 at 8.)

"AMERICAN PIANO": DONALD BERMAN

Carl Ruggles and Charles Ives were a comradely pair of salty New England transcendentalists, but their artistic personae were utterly different—Ruggles was ruminative, rational, and severe; Ives prolific, eclectic, and occasionally sentimental. Berman, a smart and decisive interpreter, teams up with the pianist Christopher Oldfather and the violinist Daniel Stepner to perform Ruggles's complete piano works (including two previously unheard pieces) and a cache of Ives rarities (including "Bethany" and the Second Violin Sonata). (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. April 3 at 8.)

LOOK & LISTEN FESTIVAL

This new-music series, inaugurated at the Ace Gallery last year, moves to Art in General for three diverse programs, featuring works by such composers as Tower, Crumb, Takemitsu, and Steven Mackey. (79 Walker St. April 3-5 at 8. For information about tickets, call 718-622-3005.)

FREDRIK ULLÉN: "TRINITY"

Ullén, the formidable Swedish piano virtuoso, offers the first live performance of a complex and passionate ninety-minute solo work by George Flynn (a pioneer, with Cage and Higgins, of the very nineteen-sixties genre of "danger music") that dwells on the history of violence in the twentieth century. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. 212-279-4200. April 4 at 7:30.)

PIETER WISPELWEY

Wispelwey is probably the world's leading cult cellist, having slowly amassed an extensive and acclaimed discography on Channel Classics. This Dutch musician brings as much interpretive subtlety and rhythmic verve to the modern repertory as he does to the Baroque—something that makes his upcoming Bach and Britten recitals so enticing. April 5 at 5: Wispelwey plays the complete Bach solo suites at Alice Tully Hall. ♦ April 6 at 11 A.M.: The three Britten solo suites, presented at Walter Reade Theatre. (Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLES

The mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer and the pianist Anne Schein, lovely artists each, join some Philharmonic friends for a richly atmospheric program of Brahms (including the Viola Sonata in E-Flat Major and the Two Songs, Op. 91), Chausson, Debussy, and Ravel (including the "Chansons Madécasses"). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 6 at 3.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Lee Luvisi and Ani Kavafian perform four of Mozart's Sonatas for Piano and Violin. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. April 6 at 5.)

"FREE FOR ALL AT TOWN HALL"

Back in the nineteen-forties and fifties, Town Hall was a magnet for the world's most compelling recitalists—and for the city's most discerning audiences. Jacqueline Taylor and Omus Hirshbein—veteran producers for such organizations as the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the 92nd Street Y—are hoping to bring back the glory years with a series of free concerts by top-rank artists; it begins with a program by two fiery players, the violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, who perform music by Schubert, Fauré, and Beethoven (the Violin Sonata No. 7 in C Minor). (123 W. 43rd St. April 6 at 5. Tickets, which are limited to two per customer, will be available at the box office at noon on the day of the concert.)

"MAKING MUSIC": OSVALDO GOLIJOV

Carnegie Hall's occasional series of concerts-with-commentary at Weill Recital Hall continues with an offering of music by the ubiquitous Osvaldo Golijov, along with some selections by a few of his favorite composers (including a sleek arrangement of Esquivel's lounge classic "Mini Skirt"). Dawn Upshaw, David Krakauer, and the Kronos Quartet are the performers. (212-247-7800. April 7 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WAR CULTURE"

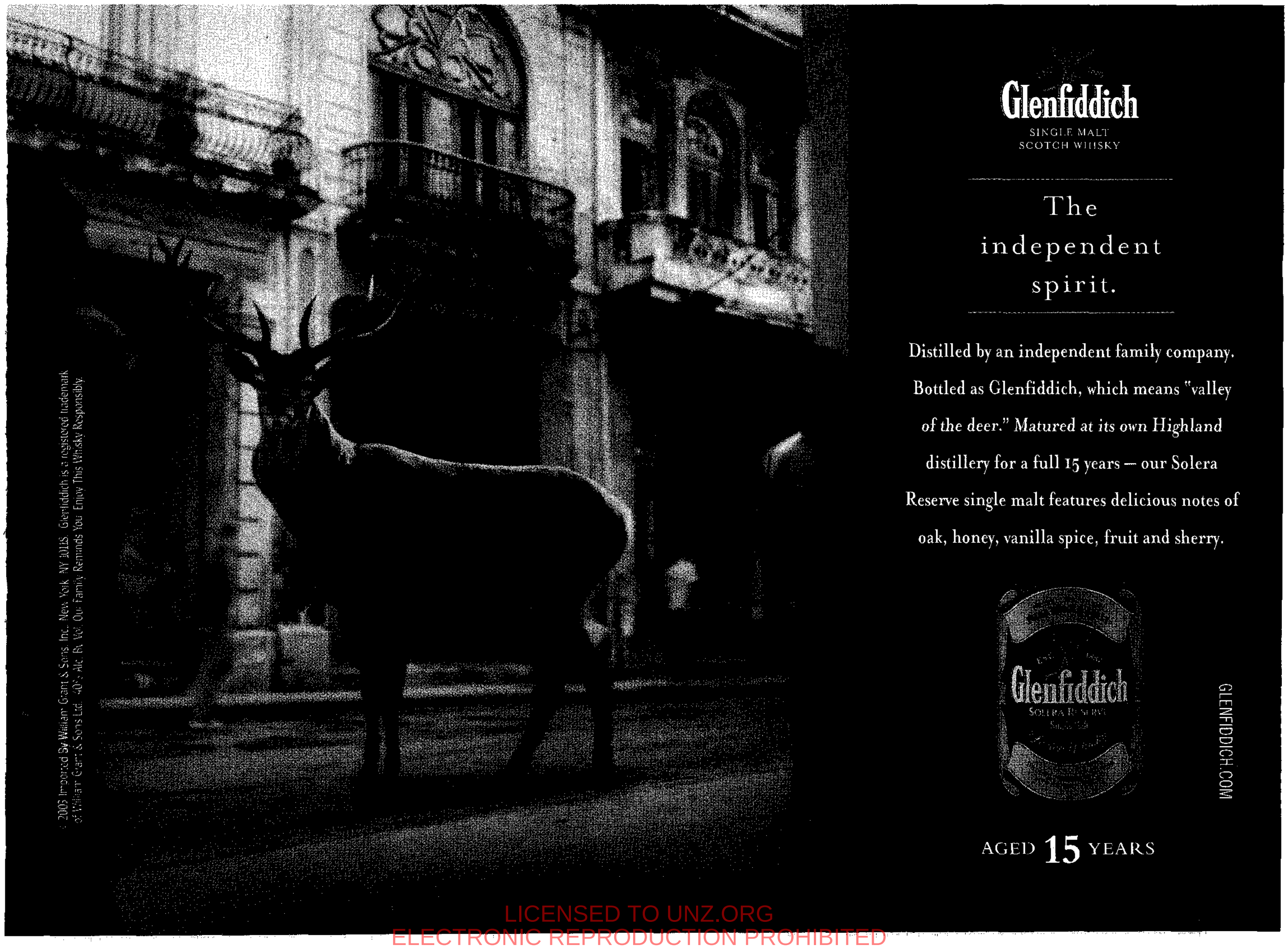
The choreographers Jill Sigman and Renata Celichowska, the cartoonist Peter Kuper, the comedian Zeroboy, and a slew of other downtown artists and performers voice their concerns about the current state of the military-entertainment complex. (Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Sq. S. No tickets necessary. April 3 at 7:30.)

READINGS

April 7 at 8: Rick Bass and Annie Proulx read from their recent work. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.) ♦ April 8 at 2: John Ashbery and Mark Ford share their verse. (The Russian Samovar, 256 W. 52nd St. 212-757-0168.) ♦ April 8-9 at 7:30: The Poetry Society of America presents two nights dedicated to honoring new American poets. The participants include David Berman, Matthea Harvey, Prageeta Sharma, and Geoffrey G. O'Brien, along with the four inaugural P.S.A. chapbook fellows. (The New School, 66 W. 12th St. For more information, call 212-254-9628.)

TALKS

April 2 at 8: Boris Fishman, the editor of "Wild East," a forthcoming anthology of fiction about Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union after the collapse of Communism, discusses the appeal of writing about Russia with the novelists Gary Shteyngart and Paul Greenberg. (Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, Amsterdam Ave. at 76th St. For more information, call 646-505-5708.) ♦ April 2 at 8: The "Little Gray Book" lecture series returns with a night dedicated to predicting the future. Participants include Paul Tough (on his experience with professional futurism), Brett Martin (on the oracular power of animals), and Whitney Pastorek (on the prospects for her own marriage). (Galapagos, 70 N. 6th St. Williamsburg, Brooklyn. 718-782-5188.)



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MOVIES OPENING

CET AMOUR-LÀ
Jeanne Moreau plays the writer Marguerite Duras, in a drama about her relationship at the age of sixty-five with a devoted young student (Aymeric Demarigny). Directed by Josée Dayan. In French. Opening April 2. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

COWBOY BEBOP: THE MOVIE
A crew of bounty hunters track down terrorists who have released a deadly virus, in an *anime* film directed by Shinichiro Watanabe. Dubbed into English. Opening April 4.

FELLINI: I'M A BORN LIAR
Damian Pettigrew's portrait of the director includes interviews with Terence Stamp, Italo Calvino, Donald Sutherland, and Fellini himself, a few months before his death. In English and Italian. Opening April 2. (Film Forum.)

THE GOOD THIEF
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 2.

THE GUYS
An adaptation of Anne Nelson's play, in which a journalist (Sigourney Weaver) helps a fire captain (Anthony LaPaglia) write eulogies for the members of his squad who died in the World Trade Center. Directed by Jim Simpson. Opening April 4.

LEVITY
Ed Solomon's directorial début is about an ex-con (Billy Bob Thornton) trying to make amends for a crime he committed as a teen-ager. With Morgan Freeman, Kirsten Dunst, and Holly Hunter. Opening April 4.

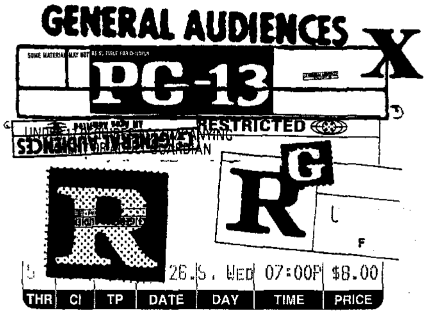
A MAN APART
Vin Diesel plays a D.E.A. agent determined to avenge his wife's murder, in an action thriller directed by F. Gary Gray. Opening March 4.

MANNA FROM HEAVEN
Gabrielle and Maria Burton directed this drama set in Buffalo, New York, about a nun (Ursula Burton) who tries to convince her friends to return a windfall of cash. The ensemble cast includes Seymour Cassel and Shirley Jones. Opening April 4.

THE MAN WITHOUT A PAST
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 4. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

PHONE BOOTH
In Joel Schumacher's thriller, a sniper threatens to shoot a media consultant (Colin Farrell) standing inside a Times Square telephone booth. With Katie Holmes, Forest Whitaker, and Kiefer Sutherland. Opening April 4.

WHAT A GIRL WANTS
A teen comedy about an American girl (Amanda Bynes) who tracks down her absentee father, an English lord (Colin Firth). Opening April 4.



FILM NOTES

AGENT CODY BANKS
M.G.M.'s new franchise (a sequel is already in the works) is more "Inspector Gadget" than "Spy Kids," but it's a sweet time just the same. Frankie Muniz (Malcolm of "Malcolm in the Middle") is adorable as the shy teen-age secret agent who woos a girl (Hilary Duff) while saving the world from an army of killer nanobots. The director Harald Zwart's spry direction and a set design straight out of the Sharper Image catalogue give the film a cheery tone, and seeing actual teen-age actors playing teen-agers is refreshing.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, 59th Street East Cinema, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

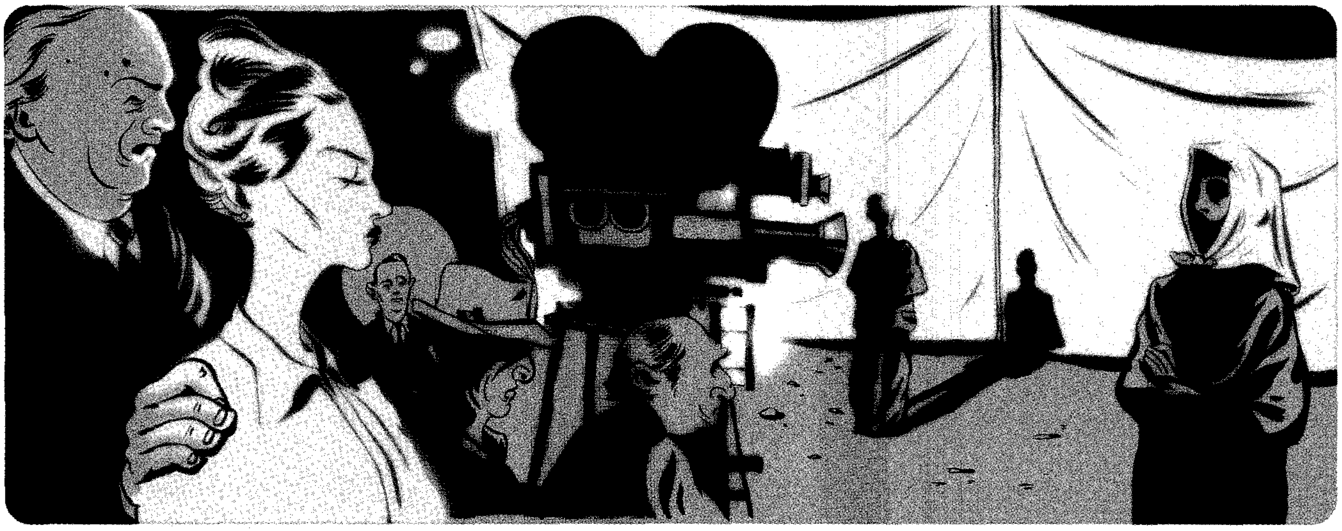
ALL THE REAL GIRLS
For his follow-up to "George Washington," the director David Gordon Green has turned his gaze upon a quiet mill town in North Carolina. You can tell the place is quiet because Paul (Paul Schneider) enjoys a reputation as its most carousing and cavalier stud. In fact, Paul is a nondescript time-waster of twenty-two, a blunt boy whose best friend is really his mother (Patricia Clarkson). Having tasted and discarded half the local womenfolk, Paul is nonplussed when he finds himself falling for, and then two-timed by, Noel (Zooey Deschanel). Green presents this as an education of the heart, a lyrical act of persuasion that is backed up by random shots of sunsets and tumbling creeks. To the rest of us, it looks like comeuppance. Why the sweetly unreadable Noel should hang around the place a minute longer is anybody's guess.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/17 & 24/03.) (Village East Cinemas.)

CITY OF GOD
Just how far into your face can a movie get? This one has every intention of leaving you scalded and bruised. Set in Rio de Janeiro, it was directed by Fernando Meirelles, who tries every trick known to cameramen: freeze frames, whip pans, multiple dissolves, slow motion, double motion, any kind of motion. The object is to keep pace with his characters, the young and dispossessed of the Brazilian slums. The movie hastens roughly from the nineteen-sixties to the eighties, as we watch the boys either die or grow old before their time. The result is a jolting ride, but such is the skill on show that we run the risk of being too exhilarated to notice every death; does the film convince in its plea for the forgotten poor, or are we encouraged to forget them as they fall? In Portuguese.—*A.L.* (1/20/03) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, and Kew Gardens Cinema.)

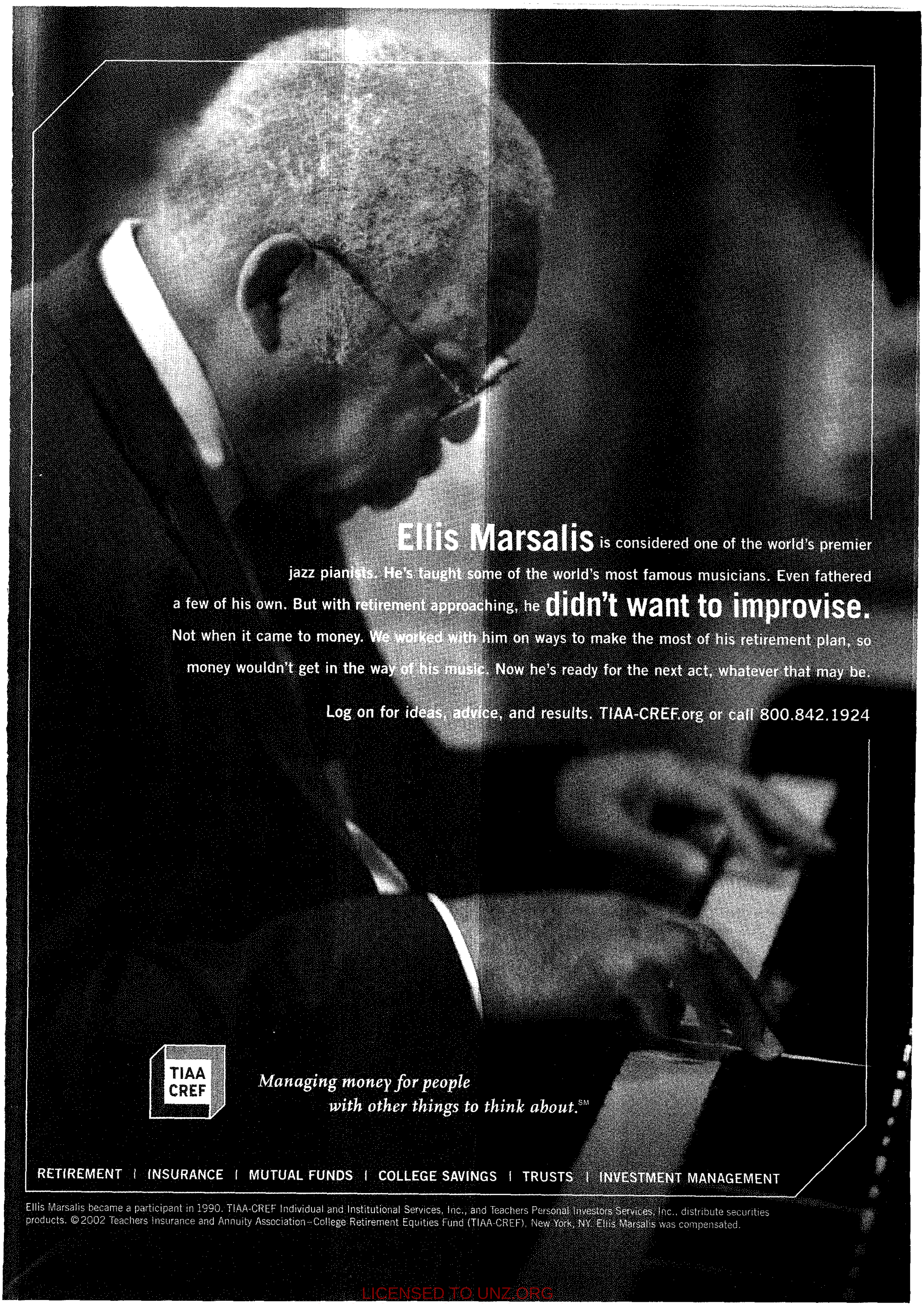
DREAMCATCHER
This big-budget horror film, based on a novel by Stephen King and directed by Lawrence Kasdan, features a lot of pretty New England snow and four male friends (Thomas Jane, Jason Lee, Damian Lewis, and Timothy Olyphant) held together by a special past. But still, in the end, it's an abominable-worm picture. About three feet long, tubular, and slithering, the creature enters people's bodies somehow or other and then tears through their guts. All in all, it's not an unimpressive worm, but we've seen it before. As for the plot, it seems that alien creatures have landed, and an American military force, led by a mad colonel (Morgan Freeman), is out to quarantine the area and destroy the humans who have been infected. Or something like that. Incoherent and repulsive, "Dreamcatcher" is a redundant procession of arbitrary scares and thrills without a unifying visual or poetic idea. The veteran William Goldman wrote the screenplay with Kasdan.—*David Denby* (3/31/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

HEAD OF STATE
Chris Rock will make a great movie someday, but this lame comedy, which he directed and co-wrote, is as stale as yesterday's malt liquor. The promising setup has Rock as a Washington, D.C., alderman who's tapped to run for President so that he'll lose, paving the way for another candidate. The film could have been an all-out satiric barrage like "Hollywood Shuffle" or a culturally acute comedy like "Barbershop." Instead, it's one tepid racial joke after another, interspersed with Rock's cringe-inducing sermonizing about the plight of the inner city. The film is almost saved by the support of Bernie Mac, who cuts a swath through the talk-show circuit as a menacing, defensive bail bondsman and Vice-Presidential candidate.—*Michael Agger* (Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Theatre.)

THE HUNTED
There's trouble in the Pacific Northwest: Benicio Del Toro is in the woods, protecting the deer. A former U.S. Army assassin, he's been trained in wilderness tracking and hand-to-hand combat, but a tour of duty in Bosnia sent him over the edge. This is bad news for the master tracker L. T. Bonham (Tommy


ZOHAR LAZAR

The documentary "Fellini: I'm a Born Liar" opens April 2 at Film Forum.



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Lee Jones), happily retired to British Columbia. After Del Toro takes out two hunters, the F.B.I. picks up Jones in a helicopter and charges him with bringing in his former protégé. This manly movie belongs to the veteran director William Friedkin, who seems to have lost any idea of how to show the art of tracking onscreen. By the evidence presented here, it seems to mean smelling your fingers, staring into tree branches, and walking oddly, as though you'd pulled a muscle.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

INVESTIGATION OF A CITIZEN ABOVE SUSPICION

Elio Petri's indirect way of telling a story—which gradually takes the form of a paranoid fantasy—makes the viewer apprehensive. His purpose is ostensibly political, but sometimes he becomes so sophisticated and nasty and perverse that you don't trust his purposes. Here, starting with Kafka's cryptic "He is a servant of the law and eludes judgment," he sets out to demonstrate that those in authority are above the law they are supposed to serve. He chooses for his demonstration the megalomaniac chief of Rome's homicide squad (Gian Maria Volonté), who believes he has a license to kill, and has just been promoted to a new post, in which he is to deal with political dissidents. The queasy, tense atmosphere derives not from the horror of the proposition itself but from the kinkiness of the details, such as Ennio Morricone's jangly music when the cop slits the throat of his mistress (Florinda Bolkan). The film is extremely dislikable. Petri is a highly skilled director, but he doesn't use suspense pleasurably; he doesn't resolve the tensions, and so you're left in a rather foul mood. Originally released in 1970. In Italian.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; starting April 4.)

IRREVERSIBLE

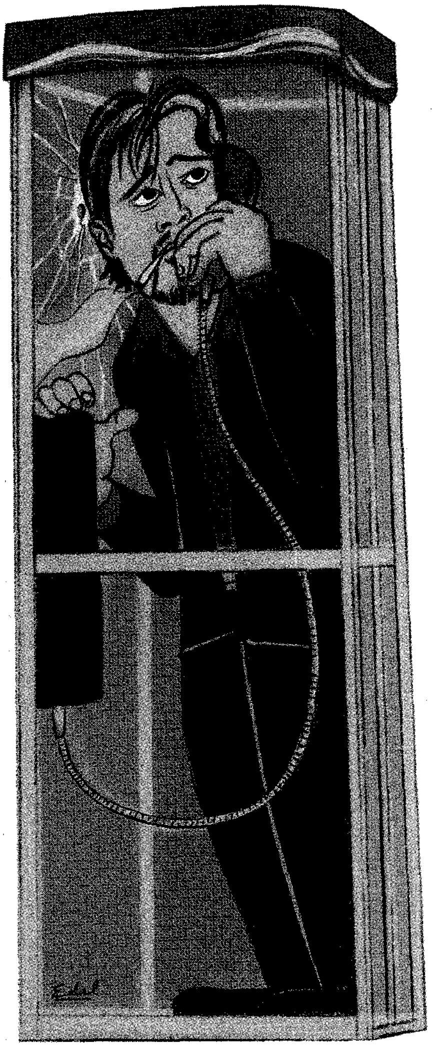
A thoroughly nasty piece of work, though not an empty or a foolish one: the director, Gaspar Noé, gives every sign of careful cleverness. His film tells of a young couple (Monica Bellucci and Vincent Cassel) who make love, go to a Paris party, and leave separately. She is raped and beaten; he pursues the assailant and takes what he believes to be revenge. The whole story runs backward, beginning with death and violation and rewinding to a nice afternoon, a bright white screen, and the joyful strains of Beethoven. The irony is pure acid: any pleasure that we meet later in the film is spoiled and scarred by the events of the first half, which are not so much irreversible as unwatchable. The trouble is that the picture has fallen victim to its own reputation; from here on, despite the seriousness of Noé's intentions, he will be known as the Man Who Showed Too Much. In French.—*A.L.* (3/10/03) (Angelika Film Center.)

THE LAST LAUGH

A breathtaking achievement in silent-film technique, from the German studio UFA. Emil Jannings is the man whose self-esteem and position in society depend on his uniform, in F. W. Murnau's masterpiece of design and cinematography. The scenario is by Carl Mayer; the camerawork is by Karl Freund. Originally released in 1924.—*P.K.* (Moving Image; April 5.)

LAUREL CANYON

After the solemnities of "High Art," the director Lisa Cholodenko has turned to lighter matters: specifically, what to do if your mother is an unreconstructed hippie. Sam (Christian Bale) takes his fiancée, Alex (Kate Beckinsale), home to California to meet his mom, Jane (Frances McDormand), a record producer whose walls of photographs bear testament to a life misspent in rock. She is all the family that Sam has but far more than he wants, especially since Jane's idea of quality time is to come within an inch of seducing her son's girlfriend, while bringing a shameless young rock star (Alessandro Nivola) along for the ride. The movie has poise and a lightly perspiring sexiness, but also an uncertain sense of humor, and you end up rooting for the squares—especially Sam and his colleague Sara (Natascha McElhone), who have more fun in the front of a Volvo than seems either practical or legal. The soundtrack is full of ersatz British pop, so tuneless and squally that it could almost be the real thing.—*A.L.* (3/10/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)



Colin Farrell in "Phone Booth."

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

NIGHT AND THE CITY

Several years before he made "Rififi," Jules Dassin directed this less flamboyant 1950 thriller, which is much less well known, but in some ways better. Dassin's shocking specialty—a kind of stifled violence that one fears will explode—finds the right milieu in the Gerald Kersh novel, a complex view of the underside of London entertainment. An Anglo-American cast is headed by Richard Widmark, who has possibly his best role as Harry Fabian, "the artist without an art," a tout with a creative passion for fantastic, shady schemes. The victims of his double-crossing artistry include Googie Withers, Francis L. Sullivan, Gene Tierney, Herbert Lom, and—as the old-time wrestler pitted against Mike Mazurki—Stanislaus Zbyszko.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; April 2-3.)

OLD SCHOOL

Vince Vaughn, tall and handsome, with a widow's peak and a roving eye, is easily the most untrustworthy man in the movies since the advent of Bill Murray. In this genial hit movie, Vaughn is operating in low gear as a cocky salesman; the role isn't enough for him, but he's still hilarious, and so, at times, is the movie. Written (with many collaborators) and directed by Todd Phillips and assembled under the benevolent auspices of the comedy veteran Ivan Reitman, "Old School" follows a trio of thirtyish losers unable to face responsibility: the earnest and baffled Mitch (Luke Wilson); the hapless and uninhibited Frank (Will Ferrell); and the flimflamming wise guy Beanie (Vaughn). Together, the three open a frat house at the edge of some distinguished seat of higher learning. Each of the leads is funny in his own style, especially Ferrell, who has an almost frighteningly infantile quality.—*D.D.* (3/17/03) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE PIANIST

Roman Polanski's drama about the survival of a real-life Polish Jew, the pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman (Adrien Brody), during the grim days of the Holocaust is a movie that has been perfectly produced. The sense of scale and detail is exact, and the violence is neither exaggerated nor minimized but presented with clear-eyed accuracy. Yet this is not a work of great originality or imagination. Its protagonist lacks depth, and the theme of survival through hiding is, by its very nature, redundant. The playwright Ronald Harwood adapted the 1946 book that Szpilman wrote about his experiences without attempting to open up the hero at all. Is he ashamed, defiant, guilty? Grateful for his luck? We haven't a clue. His survival is an anomaly, a mistake, a joke—and that may be why the story appealed to Polanski. Shot largely in Warsaw.—*D.D.* (1/13/03) (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

RAISING VICTOR VARGAS

A lovely small-scale comedy about the commonplace mating rituals in a Dominican section of Manhattan. It's summer, and everyone is on the prowl, but the neighborhood is friendly and peaceful; chickens run through the alleys, and small gardens pop up here and there among the projects. The boys act cocky even when they're unsure of themselves, and the girls pretend they don't need boys. Nothing very important happens, but, moment by moment, the movie is alive with the play of gestures and glances, the faces of aggression and withdrawal. Victor Rasuk plays the good-looking local Casanova, perhaps eighteen years old, and Judy Marte is the wary young beauty who gets him to change his style. The writer-director Peter Sollett stays close to the actors, all nonprofessionals, and they greet the camera with a modest but exploratory willingness.—*D.D.* (3/31/03) (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

TEARS OF THE SUN

A rousing celebration of American military expertise, but one pricked by conscience. The stoical Lieutenant A. K. Waters (Bruce Willis) leads a crack unit of Navy SEALs into a civil conflict in Nigeria between Muslims and Christians. Their mission is to rescue an Italian-born American citizen (Monica Bellucci), a doctor operating a Catholic missionary hospital. Bellucci, a flaming dark beauty with a sumptuous décolletage, runs through the jungle with her shirt partly open. Because of such absurdities, and the general atmosphere of American noblesse oblige, skeptics have dismissed the movie as an embarrassing crock—another contrived occasion for U.S. soldiers to demonstrate their nobility while killing a great many nasty-looking Africans. Baldly stated, this is true, but the movie, directed by Antoine Fuqua, has been made with ravishing skill. The cinematographer Mauro Fiore does wonders matching the natural light from shot to shot.—*D.D.* (3/17/03) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

TEN

When last we saw the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, he was capturing the songs of Ugandan street children with his digital video camera, delighting in the portability and intimacy of the new technology. In this revelatory film, he reverses course and fixes his camera to the dashboard of a car driven by an unnamed, beautiful divorcée (Mania Akbari) through the streets of Tehran. (The camera faces inward.) It's a movie seemingly without a director, a drama that's also a documentary: the streets are real, the conversations scripted. The talk centers on the corseted lives of women in modern Iran, and Kiarostami's minimalist methods enhance a palpable sense of lives choked with frustration. Ironically, for a film about hidden women, the natural performance by Amin (Amin Maher), the ten-year-old son of the divorcée, reveals the most about their situation. In Farsi.—*M.A.* (Quad Cinema.)

VIEW FROM THE TOP

A sorry stewardess comedy with Gwyneth Paltrow miscast in a role more suited to Yasmine Bleeth. She plays a small-town girl, a trainee from flight-attendant school, who's out for new horizons. The cast, which includes Christina Applegate, Mark Ruffalo, and Candice Bergen, is tossed around like luggage in an

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overhead compartment by the director Bruno Barreto. Only Mike Myers, in a loony cameo as a flight instructor, gets laughs.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

BASIC
Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.
BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE
Battery Park 16, Cinema 2, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.
CHICAGO (1/6/03)
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.
THE CORE
Astor Plaza, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.
THE HOURS (12/23 & 30/02)
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and Union Square.
NOWHERE IN AFRICA
BAM Rose Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.
STEVIE
Film Forum.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

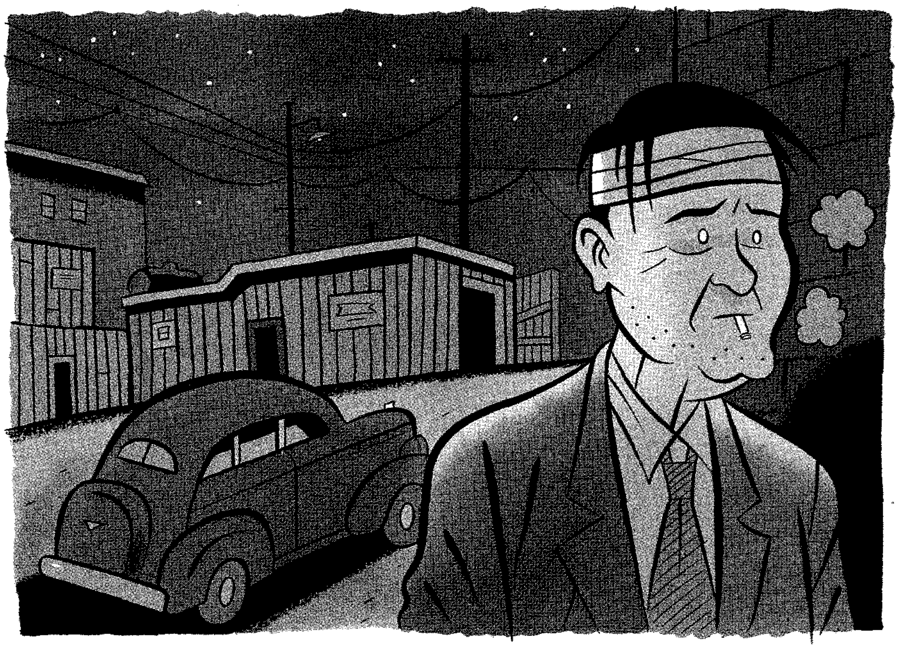
Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kew Gardens Cinema, 81-05 Lefferts Blvd., Queens (718-441-9835).
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (212-334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

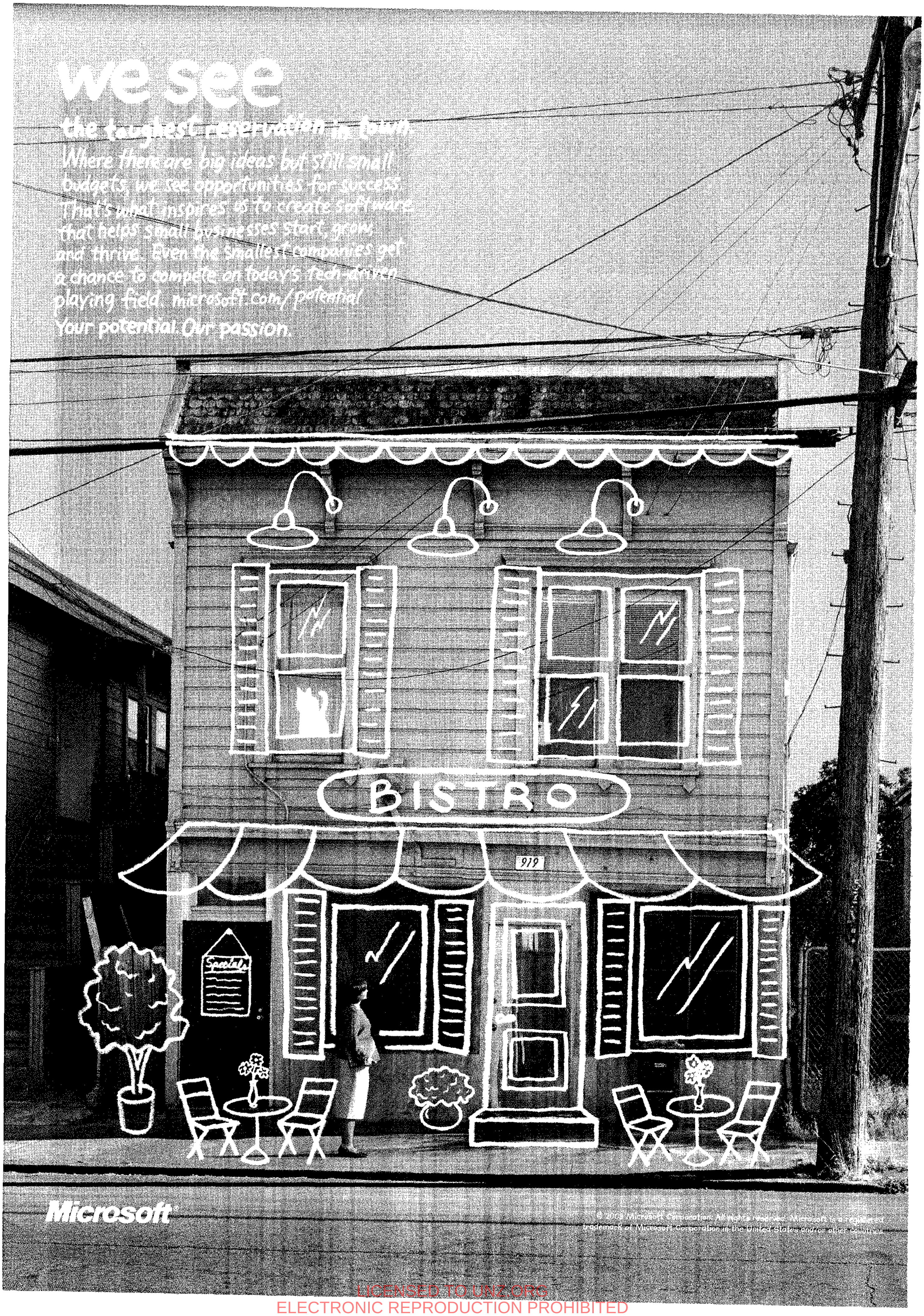
AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special event. April 3 at 7: "Phone Booth" (2003, Joel Schumacher), followed by a discussion with the screenwriter Larry Cohen. Through May 11: "Home and Away," pairings of an American film and an international film by the same director. April 5 at 2: "The Last Laugh" (†). ♦ April 5 at 4: "Sunrise" (1927, F. W. Murnau; silent). ♦ April 6 at 2: "M" (1931, Fritz Lang; in German). ♦ April 6 at 4: "Fury" (1936, Lang). ♦ Repertory nights. April 5-6 at 6:30: "The Night Porter" (1974, Liliana Cavani; in English and Italian).



Opening April 4, Aki Kaurismäki's "The Man Without a Past."

SETH

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—April 3 at 7 and 9:30: "Fool's Fire" (1992, Julie Taymor). ♦ April 4 at 2, 5:15, and 8:30: "Titus" (1999, Taymor). ♦ Through April 12: The Brooklyn Jewish Film Festival. April 5 at 7:30: "Taking Wing" (2000, Steve Suissa; in French). ♦ April 6 at 2 and April 7 at 4:30: "Asesino" (2003, Nurit Kedar) and "The Legacy of Felix Nussbaum" (1993, Barbara Pfeffer). ♦ April 6 at 4: "The Possessed" (2001, Pearl Lang). ♦ April 6 at 6:15: "Last Dance" (2002, Mirra Bank). ♦ April 6 at 9:15: "Lisa" (2000, Pierre Grimblat; in French). ♦ April 7 at 6:15: "The Klarsfelds" (2002, Elizabeth Citroen). ♦ April 7 at 9: "Secret Lives" (2002, Aviva Slesin). ♦ April 8 at 4:30: "Talking to the Enemy" (1985, Mira Hamermesh). ♦ April 8 at 6:20: "The Inner Tour" (2001, Ra'anan Alexandrowicz). ♦ April 8 at 8:40: "August" (2002, Avi Mograbi).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through April 3 at 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:20, and 9:20: "Night and the City" (†). ♦ Starting April 4 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:40, and 9:50: "Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion" (†).
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-315-6160)—Through May 20: The films of William Klein. April 8 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Messiah" (1999-2000).
GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through April 12: "Nicholas Ray, Writ Large," a twenty-three-film retrospective. April 3 at 5:45: "High Green Wall" (1954) and "We Can't Go Home Again" (1973-76). ♦ April 3 at 8: "Lightning Over Water" (1980, Ray and Wim Wenders). ♦ April 4 at 2: "I'm a Stranger Here Myself: A Portrait of Nicholas Ray" (1974, David Helpern, Jr., and James C. Gutman). ♦ April 4 at 8:15: "The Savage Innocents" (1960). ♦ Recent work from the New York-based filmmaker Jem Cohen. April 4 at 6: "Little Flags" (2000) and "Chain Times Three" (2002). ♦ A tribute to the director Karel Reisz. April 7 at 7: "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" (1960).
SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. April 4-5: "Showgirls" (1995, Paul Verhoeven).
THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"New Voices Since the Eighties." April 5 at 1 and 6:45: "Breaking the Waves" (1996, Lars Von Trier). ♦ April 5 at 3:45 and 9:30: "Dancer in the Dark" (2000, Von Trier). ♦ April 6 at 2 and 6:45: "The Celebration" (1998, Thomas Vinterberg; in Danish, German, and English). ♦ April 6 at 4 and 8:45: "The Idiots" (1998, Von Trier; in Danish).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through April 6: "New Directors/New Films." Some screenings will be held at Alice Tully Hall and the Gramercy Theatre. See www.filmlinc.com for venues. April 2 at 6:30 and April 3 at 9: "The Guys" (2002, Jim Simpson). ♦ April 2 at 9 and April 3 at 6: "The Missing Gun" (2002, Lu Chuan; in Mandarin). ♦ April 3 at 6 and April 4 at 9: "Autumn Spring" (2002, Vladimír Michálek; in Czech). ♦ April 3 at 9 and April 4 at 6: "Guardian of the Frontier" (2002, Maja Weiss; in Slovenian). ♦ April 4-5 at 6: "Angela" (2002, Roberta Torre; in Italian). ♦ April 4 at 9 and April 6 at 3: "Camp" (2003, Todd Graff). ♦ April 5 at 1 and April 6 at 9: "Hukkle" (2002, György Pálfi; in Hungarian). ♦ April 5 at 3:30 and April 6 at 6: "Abouna" (2002, Mahamat Saleh Haroun; in French). ♦ April 5 at 9 and April 6 at noon: "The Clay Bird" (2002, Tareque Masud; in Bengali). ♦ Starting April 5: The New York African Film Festival. April 5 at 1:30 and 9, April 6 at 8:30, April 7 at 1:30 and 6, and April 8 at 1:30 and 8:30: "Waiting for Happiness" (2002, Abderrahmane Sissako; in Hassania). ♦ April 5 at 4 and April 7 at 3:30: "Life on Earth" (2000, Sissako; in Bambara and French). ♦ April 5 at 6:30: "My Land, My Life" (2002, Rehad Desai). ♦ April 6 at 1 and April 7 at 8:15: "Rostov Luanda" (1997, Sissako; in Arabic, Russian, Portuguese, and French). ♦ April 6 at 3:30 and April 8 at 3:30: "Heritage Africa" (1989, Kwaw Ansah). ♦ April 6 at 5:45: "Wa'n Wina" (2001, Dumisani Phakathi; in English, Sotho, and Zulu).



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THE
NEW YORKER

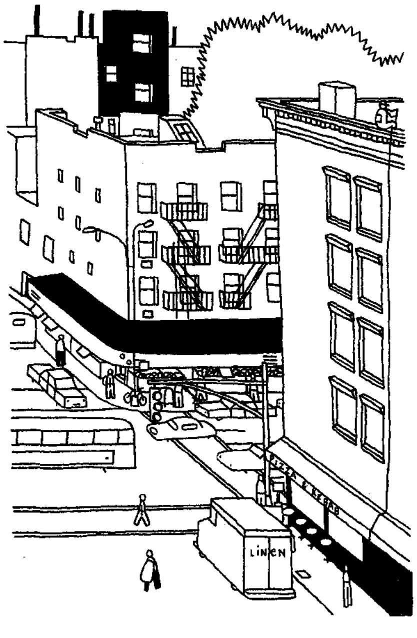
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

One of the characteristic horrors of what Raymond Aron called the century of total war was the expansion of the battlefield to encompass whole societies. In many of the twentieth century's conflicts, from the Philippines to Algeria to Vietnam and beyond, the distinction between soldiers and civilians offered the latter scant protection. In the bloodiest of all, the Second World War, both sides adopted a strategy of deliberately killing civilians and destroying cities—usually by means of aerial bombing, and always with the aim of breaking an enemy nation's will, or, failing that, its physical ability, to continue. The "good war," in this sense, was bad in the extreme. The damage inflicted upon London and Dresden, Rotterdam and Tokyo, Leningrad and Hiroshima was anything but collateral. It was the whole point.

Whatever else can be said about the war against the Iraqi dictatorship that began on March 19th, it cannot be said that the Anglo-American invaders have pursued anything remotely resembling a policy of killing civilians deliberately. And, so far, they have gone to great tactical and technological lengths to avoid doing it inadvertently, too. Collateral damage is one of those antiseptic-sounding euphemisms that are sometimes more chilling than plain language, so hard do they labor to conceal their human meaning. It would be indecent to belittle the agony that has already been inflicted; you have only to imagine yourself, for example, as the parent or child of one of the dozens of people who were blown apart or maimed last Wednesday, and again last Friday, when stray bombs plowed into Baghdad marketplaces. But this kind of "damage" is indeed "collateral," not only in that there is a serious effort to avoid it but also in that the intended purpose of the bombing of Baghdad, which so far has apparently been aimed only at military and government installations, has been to break not the will of the Iraqi people but the connections between them and their tyrannical rulers. Indiscriminate bombing would actually strengthen those connections, as we know from the experience of the Second World War and Vietnam. What we do not yet know is whether a different intention, backed by technologies of precision, will produce a different political result. And we do not yet know whether even the intention can survive the transition—which suddenly seems more likely than not—from a quick war of shock and awe to a grinding, protracted struggle, hand to hand and house to house.



The war in Iraq is a new kind of total war. The immense anxiety it is provoking throughout the Western world, perhaps most keenly in the United States, is more than a matter of compassion for the sufferings of people far away. The dread is a kind that hits closer to home. It is bound up with a set of fears that, in the runup to the war, had been invoked in different ways by both supporters and opponents of the impending conflict. One such fear is that "weapons of mass destruction," especially portable ones, will find their way into the hands of undeterrable terrorists. Another is that what began as a measured campaign against terrorist bands and the handful of rogue states that may or may not try fitfully to use them for their own purposes will morph into a globe-spanning, escalating struggle between the Islamic world and the United States. The Bush Administration maintains that in the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURENT CILLUFFO

end this war will lessen both of these dangers; so, more conditionally, does the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair. Many others—in good faith, here and abroad—fear that in the end this war will do just the opposite.

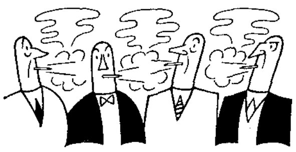
The clash of arms is sharply limited in space, in time, and in the number of actual participants; but it is unlimited in its psychic presence in the lives of virtually every sentient person in the developed and half-developed world. The satellites that orbit the earth and the hundreds of millions of television sets that dot it insure that this is so. The fighting may not be total, but the audience is total; and in this sense the war is total. It is a world war. The war as it is seen here is not quite the same as it is seen elsewhere—elsewhere the screen shows more corpses and fewer retired generals with maps and pointers—but everywhere the war fills the field of vision. And this, too, brings its own kind of collateral damage.

One small example: Within hours of the war's beginning, the Cuban government began systematically arresting its nonviolent opponents and confiscating their papers, typewriters, and other records. Although the handful of leaders whose names are best known abroad have (for that reason) been left alone, those who have been seized make up the bulk of the active civic opposition, which, on account of the option of exile, is as small as it is courageous. Seventy-seven men and one woman were behind bars as of the end of last week, including the poet Raúl Rivero, once the Moscow bureau chief of Prensa Latina, the Cuban news agency, now an independent journalist; Oscar Espinosa Chepe, an economist and ex-foreign-service officer; and Marcelo López Bañobre, a former tugboat captain, now spokesman for the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. The predicament of these people, who are guilty only of bearing witness to facts the regime wants to suppress, is enviable compared with that of those who are suffering and dying in Iraq today, and also of those who have suffered and died there through the decades of Saddam's rule. There's a war on, and Fidel Castro knows it. Absent Iraq, what the Commandante is doing would be front-page news throughout Europe and the Americas; most likely he would not be doing it at all. "Human rights in Cuba can therefore be viewed as one of the first cases of collateral damage in the second Gulf war," Robert Ménard, secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders, said on March 21st. "Human rights in other countries could also soon suffer the same fate." Mr. Ménard is French; even so, he was soon proved right. In Zimbabwe last week, hundreds of opponents of the Robert Mugabe regime were arrested or beaten. There is similar news from Belarus, but it is little seen or heard. The fog of war is thick, and it covers the globe.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

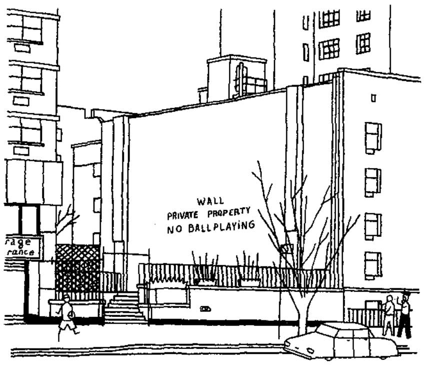
TUNING IN

A BUTCHER FROM BAGHDAD



On a normal night, the water-pipe smokers and Arab-coffee drinkers and cardplayers at the Ya Liel Ya Eien café, in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, start to clear out at around seven or eight. But by 10 P.M. last Thursday, with the big-screen television in the back of the brightly lit room showing Al Jazeera all the time, none of the twenty or so customers seemed remotely interested in going home. At the table closest to the screen, a Yemeni dressmaker, a Palestinian flea-market peddler, and a Jordanian graduate student were staring at footage of a bombed Baghdad neighborhood and occasionally releasing clouds of smoke scented with honey and apple. "Why this war, and what kind of war will be clean war?" Adel Habbas, the Palestinian, asked. "I never in my life see clean war."

The men at the table opposed the war, more in sadness than in anger—though in the same breath they all wondered why America didn't get rid of their dictators. "I would like to see a different President every four years in the Arab world, you know?" Habbas said.



One table over, a young man sat by himself. Slender, with chiselled features and sad glittering eyes, he hadn't taken off his black nylon coat, as if at any moment he might have to bolt. He was chain-smoking Marlboro Lights and chewing on the corner of a plastic bag as he glanced nervously at the screen. He gave his name as Ali Hassan, and said that he was a butcher from Baghdad.

In 1984, when he was fifteen, his father, who was also a butcher, was arrested by Saddam Hussein's security police for making some careless comment about the regime. Three months later, the remains of the body, which had been fed through a meat grinder, were returned to Hassan's family with a demand for a thousand dinars for the trouble. In August of 1990, Hassan found himself conscripted into Saddam's Army and was sent into Kuwait. He and three comrades managed to desert their unit in the first week of the occupation. After walking all night, they wound up in Saudi Arabia, where Hassan eventually turned himself over to coalition troops. "And they give me to Nebraska."

By 1994, Hassan had a job at a meat-packing plant in the town of Schuyler. "Very boring in Nebraska," he said. "And too much cold." But at the gaming tables there he acquired a talent for roulette; a few years ago, when he moved to Brooklyn and began working at a Bay Ridge butcher shop, Hassan transferred his operations to Atlantic City. For the past few weeks, though, he hasn't been able to bring himself to go.

Within two hours of President Bush's ultimatum for Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq, no one was answering the phone at Hassan's mother's house, near downtown Baghdad. His nine sisters, along with their husbands and children, were also in hiding somewhere. Since the start of the war, Hassan has heard nothing from any of his family members. He thought he knew where they were: his father once owned a large garden, just outside Baghdad, and although the garden, along with the family house, had been seized by the police when Hassan's father was arrested, his mother and his sisters had taken refuge there during the 1991 bombing of Baghdad, and again during the cruise-missile strikes of 1998. Hassan hoped that they had made their way to the garden this time, too.

On the large screen, a coalition tank rolled over a picture of Saddam. Hassan laughed with delight. A few moments later, an old woman wailed to the Al Jazeera reporter about civilian deaths, and Hassan chewed rapidly on the piece of plastic. He couldn't settle on one attitude toward the war: "Actually, I'm happy fifty and I'm angry about the people fifty. What do you think—the people of Iraq against America? No. But Saddam the problem. Like Hitler. You know Hitler?"

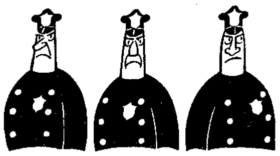
Raw almonds were passed around. A patron stopped by Hassan's table to report, with pleasure, that millions of people were demonstrating in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Hassan was in no mood to argue. "This is against the war," he clarified. "Not for Saddam." Then he leaned across the table, his left eye suddenly fluttering in a confidential wink, and murmured, "No one here have the news about Iraq. Just me. I'm from Baghdad, I know Saddam."

On the whole, Hassan agreed with the other men in the room that Al Jazeera provided more reliable information than CNN. This was war, he said, with people dying terrible deaths on both sides, but Americans were getting a sanitized picture. As the night wore on and the war footage rolled relentlessly across the screen, he fell into gloom. Eliminating Saddam began to seem an impossible project. "I don't think America kill Saddam," he said. "They kill all the people in Iraq, but Saddam will go out. Maybe now he's outside Iraq, maybe in the White House in Washington, D.C. Or if he don't leave the country he's work as taxi-driver—car service. What you think? He's get different face."

If—*Inshallah*—his family survives the war, and Saddam doesn't, Hassan has a plan. First, he'll go out for a celebratory drink with friends. Then he'll head down to Atlantic City and spend ten days at the roulette wheel. Then he'll buy a plane ticket to Baghdad, to visit his mother and his sisters and his eighteen-year-old girlfriend, whom he has never seen, except in the picture that his mother sent when she selected the girl for him. Finally—Hassan now sketched a map of Iraq on a piece of paper, with family landmarks prominently featured—he'll drive out of town to look in on his father's garden, with its palm trees, its oranges and lemons and almonds, its chickens, sheep, and cows.

—*George Packer*

HOME-TOWN SECURITY DEPT.
THE SURGE



Last Wednesday, shortly before four in the afternoon, Lieutenant Bruce Simonetti left his office, at Transit Police District 2 headquarters, underneath Canal Street, boarded the A train heading downtown, and disembarked two stops later, at the Broadway-Nassau Street station. Twenty-four police officers—eight from Manhattan, eight from the Bronx, and eight more from Queens—were waiting for him there, along with three sergeants, in front of a newsstand that proclaimed, in large block letters, "God Bless America." Another eight cops from Brooklyn were expected, but when, after about ten minutes, they hadn't shown up, Simonetti gave the order to move out. The officers, who were all wearing bulletproof vests and carrying what are known as "escape masks," pushed through the gate, and took the No. 4 train up to the Brooklyn Bridge stop.

Simonetti, who has been with the N.Y.P.D. for eighteen years, is a compact man with thinning brown hair and a friendly, oval face. "I love this type of work," he said on the way uptown. "I'm a people person. I love to talk." In normal times, transit police deal mainly with pickpockets and thieves, or "lush workers," who prey on anyone unfortunate—or drunk—enough to fall asleep in the subway. But these, of course, are not normal times. Nowadays, officers are assigned, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to stand guard at each end of the city's fourteen under-river subway tunnels to make sure that the tunnels don't get blown up. And every weekday morning at eight o'clock and every afternoon at four, thirty-six cops gather at a subway station in lower Manhattan for what is known as a "surge."

"What we're doing is very similar to what the military does, and to what Israel has been doing for many years," Simonetti explained. Every surge starts with all thirty-six officers going to the same station—the particular station changes each time—and then, after half an hour, dividing up, so that eighteen continue on together to the next station, while the other eighteen split up and go to two different stations, and so on through four stops. "Anybody who's bad and wants to watch to see if we're creatures of habit, we're showing them we're not," Simonetti said. "We're creating confusion."

On Wednesday afternoon, when the officers arrived at the Brooklyn Bridge station, Simonetti sent the groups from Queens and the Bronx over to the downtown side, while he stayed on the uptown side with the group from Manhattan. (The officers from Brooklyn arrived a little later.) The cops spread out along the platform. Every time a subway pulled in, they asked the conductor to hold the train in the station for an inspection. The conductor would make an announcement—usually unintelligible—and the officers would board the train. After about twenty seconds—enough time to take a quick look around, and to give any rider who had seen something suspicious time to come forward—they would step off and wave the train on. They repeated this process, uneventfully, for thirty minutes, and then it was time to head to the next station. The Bronx and Manhattan groups walked east, to work, or, in police lingo, "play," the R train platform at City Hall. Simonetti decided to take the 4 down to Fulton Street with the Queens crew. "They'll play here for half an hour," he said. Occasionally, a passerby, seeing the cops on the platform, looked around suspiciously, but most people just plowed on, lost in a rush-hour reverie.

The surge operations have been going on for nearly two months now, and during that time, not surprisingly, subway crime has dropped significantly; in District 2, which covers forty-four stations from Thirty-fourth Street to South Ferry, it's down almost sixteen per cent. In terms of terrorism, the impact of the operations is harder to measure. The most suspicious thing Simonetti said he had seen happened a few weeks ago, on the No. 2 train, at Wall Street, when a man of "how should I say it—Middle Eastern descent" got on the subway carrying an oversized VCR, "like a pizza pie." It turned out that the man had just had the VCR repaired, and had the receipt to prove it.

Simonetti caught up with the Brooklyn crew at Fulton Street on the J train platform. The officers were bunched up near the middle of the platform, but when they saw the lieutenant they quickly spread out. It was nearly six o'clock. The surge wouldn't be over for another half hour, but Simonetti decided to head back uptown to his office. He was planning to order in some dinner—a shrimp parmesan hero—and then it would be time to go back out again. Eighty-five members of the National Guard were going to be patrolling the subways, and Simonetti wanted, as he put it, "to make sure they know what they're doing."

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

DEPT. OF DISTRACTIONS
HERE COMES THE SUN

With Opening Day gone by, a visitor to the recent spring-training camps can expect to keep no more than a handful of memories of the short season, such as a low line-drive homer in Tampa by the Yankees' new import, Hideki Matsui, intensely annotated by a horde of visiting Japanese media; or a Mo Vaughn sailer at Port St. Lucie, over the right-field fence and into a sandpit, where it was excavated by an exclaiming pack of boy archeologists; or Renee Conley's birthday party in Lower Box 105, Row D, at Scottsdale Stadium, in Arizona. Renee and four slender, well-tanned friends of hers—Laura McDermott, Angie Ray, Angie Cronk, and Ann Chaillie—were dressed in jeans, tank tops, and a scattering of forward-facing baseball caps, and their occupation of this sector, close behind the backstop screen, a bit over toward the visiting-team dugout, brightened the afternoon almost as much as the sun, which had been hiding behind chilly rain clouds for the past couple of days. The women put out the news that this was Renee's twenty-first birthday, and Renee, bowing and blushing a little—she had cropped dark hair and a nice strong nose—accepted the good wishes of the old fans and kid fans around her but then said, well, no, she was *thirty-one* today. This seemed to put her about in the middle, agewise, in her bunch, who turned out to be servers from the nearby Bandera restaurant. "The best margaritas in town," said Laura, who is a bartender there. "Only don't go today, because all the staff will be rookies."

The game began—the Giants were hosting a split squad of Seattle Mariners—but the young women were distracted by party-favor comical cardboard eyeglasses, with a jagged "Happy Birthday" in exuberant colors above the frames. Putting these on could be done only by reversing the caps, and once this was done, to cascades of laughter, it was time for a round of Bud Lights and the first of a dozen or so group shots, with the girls hugging up in a tight bunch and showing their perfect teeth to each helpful, "cheese"-urging neighbor fan wielding a borrowed camera. Fan parties can turn into a royal pain if you're there for the game, but, c'mon, this was spring training, and it was a kick to see how rarely this part of Row D ever actually looked at the field.

By the time the women had slipped on pacifier-size candy rings (more snaps), you began to pick up some of the conversations and sort out the principals. Angie Ray had serious crimson lipstick and wore a cap with "Alien Workshop" over the peak, while Laura's cap said "Lucky Brand" in script astern. Angie Cronk was the one with a cluster of small silver rings in her right ear and a lavender silk scarf fashionably twisted around her short, white-blond hair. She looked a bit like Jean Seberg. One of her friends said, "Angie, your ring matches everything—God, you always look so great!"

"Ooo, look, the bases are loaded," somebody said—we were in the fifth by now—but Rich Aurilia's grand slam over the left-field fence was more or less missed because the friends were so busy with the birthday cake: two Hostess cupcakes, side by side, with a candle "3" stuck in one of them and a candle "1" in the other. Renee instantly blew them out, to a screaming that became part of the wild game noise as Barry Bonds, the next man up, delivered a monster blow over the berm in right. Nobody ate the cupcakes.

Not all the hitting was on the field. When a tall, not-so-young volunteer cameraman regrouped the friends for another album shot, he made lifting motions with his hands and said, "Come on, ladies, gimme some cleavage. In Venezuela, you'd be wearing way too many clothes."

"This is the U.S. of A.," Renee said.

Ann Chaillie, who had crinkly blond hair and was wearing a fetching straw cloche hat, had by now moved down front, in the hope of snagging a discarded game ball, and, after one was gently rolled her way across the roof of the visiting-team dugout, she screeched and danced. When a towheaded eight- or nine-year-old boy in a red T-shirt said, "If I gave you a hug and kiss, would you give me that ball in return?" she said sure. More balls were found and the hug-and-kiss barter system was quickly established, to heavy local applause. These women were not Yankee Stadium types, you saw at last. No cursing, no dishing, and a lighter coat of cool. Laura McDermott said, "Well, if you can't find an older man go for the younger ones," and she moved down with Ann and the kids, too.

All that remained was the next stage of the party. Because of the anticipated beers, the young women had parked their cars at Renee's place and safely biked to the park. The last party treat was a drawing of slips with various possible post-game destinations inked on them, including Zorba's Adult Shop, on Scottsdale Road, and a long-shot Las Vegas. "We could totally do Vegas," Angie Ray announced, but they all had to be back at work tomorrow. Laura was holding down three jobs between Thursdays and Tuesdays each week. Renee's party would soon end, possibly wrapping up at Billet Bar, a nearby biker joint, with adjoining tattoo facilities. When the friends had last been in there, a bouncer said, "Next time, ladies, back your bicycles into the rack. That way you're real bikers." The ballgame was running out—it was 7–3, Giants, in the end—though nobody wanted it or the sunshine and hurrying warm clouds to go away. The night before, President Bush had announced that Saddam Hussein had two more days in which to depart or face war. But this was still spring training, where nothing counts. We had this one coming.

—*Roger Angell*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
A CLEAN SLATE FOR IRAQ

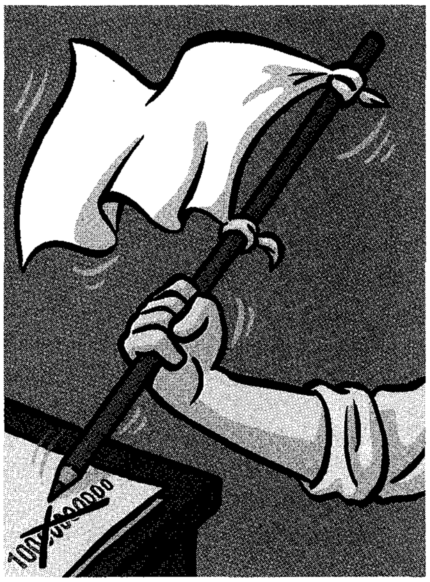
In February, 1895, Cuban nationalists seeking independence from Spain took to the hills and started a campaign of guerrilla warfare. When initial efforts to put down the rebellion failed, the Spanish military relocated hundreds of thousands of Cuban farmers into fortified concentration camps, where they soon fell prey to hunger and disease. In the United States, publicity about the camps fanned hostility toward the Spanish and, eventually, inspired calls for U.S. intervention in Cuba (where, not coincidentally, America had important economic and strategic interests). War began in the spring of 1898, and a few months later the Spanish Empire was gone.

The end of the war presented a new dilemma. Cuba had a mountain of foreign debt, and during the peace negotiations Spain insisted that the Cubans were responsible for all of it. The logic was perverse; much of that debt had been run up by the colonial authorities in their effort to crush the Cuban struggle for independence. But international law seemed to be on Spain's side. Debt, the Spanish argued, was attached to a territory, not to a regime. The money had been borrowed by Cuba, and Cuba, or the occupying Americans, had to pay it back. The regime might have changed, but the debt remained.

The U.S. rejected that argument. The Cuban people had had no say in the decision to borrow the money, and it had been spent in ways that damaged them. Therefore, Cuba should owe nothing. In the end, the new republic repudiated its debts and started over with a clean slate.

Before long, the Iraqi people will likely face a similar dilemma. In 1979, when Saddam Hussein took power, Iraq—thanks to the oil boom of the seventies—had a foreign surplus of about thirty-five billion dollars. A decade later, after the war with Iran, it had a foreign debt of some fifty billion dollars. And today, after more war and a dozen years of missed interest payments, the country owes, by many estimates, more than a hundred billion dollars. Its creditors, which include Kuwait, Bulgaria, and the Korean conglomerate Hyundai, are already jockeying for position to be repaid after the war.

Iraq has no hope of ever repaying its debts. Its annual gross domestic product is a mere thirty billion dollars, and even if this war does relatively little damage to the country's infrastructure it will take years—and tens of billions of dollars—to repair the damage that Saddam has done to the Iraqi economy. Presumably, the U.S. and others will invest heavily in reconstruction. But, if Iraq is to become stable and prosperous, it needs to spend public dollars on public goods (health, education, roads), not on debt payments to creditors who willingly lent money to Saddam.



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Even if the Iraqi people could afford to pay back Saddam's debts, it's hard to see why they should. Most of the money that Iraq borrowed in the past twenty years went either to Saddam's military misadventures in Iran and Kuwait or to his internal security apparatus. Asking the Iraqi people to assume Saddam's debts is rather like telling a man who has been shot in the head that he has to pay for the bullet.

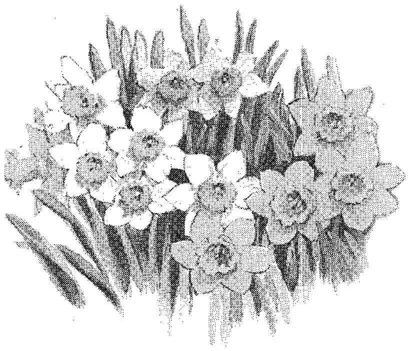
Oddly, though, that's pretty much what international custom seems to require. Lenders and borrowers still believe that debt belongs to a state, not to a regime. As a result, only a handful of countries have ever repudiated their debts. Even when tyrannical regimes have been deposed—Somoza in Nicaragua, Mobutu in Zaire, the apartheid system in South Africa—their successors have dutifully, if reluctantly, assumed their debts.

It might be time to change all that and consider an old idea that has recently been resurrected: the doctrine of odious debts. First articulated in the twenties by a former tsarist minister named Alexander Sack, the doctrine holds that a country is not responsible for debts incurred by a "despotic regime" and used for purposes "contrary to the interests of the nation." Both criteria have to be met for the debt to be considered odious. (In other words, profligate Argentina couldn't repudiate its debt, because it's a democracy.) The idea is that when the despot falls his debt disappears with him. The Harvard economists Michael Kremer and Seema Jayachandran have proposed the creation of an international institution that would have the authority to declare a regime "odious." Such a system would likely persuade lenders to avoid tyrants, as they would no longer expect to be repaid.

Western governments and bankers have long been intolerant of the odious-debt excuse; they'd prefer not to be in the business of judging whether a regime is illegitimate. They also like to get paid back. And no one wants countries to renege every time a general stages a coup. Still, even the hardest-nosed Western lenders now understand that burying new regimes under old debt is no way to encourage the spread of capitalism and democracy. In the early nineties, Poland had half its debt cancelled when it agreed to institute market reforms. More recently, a major I.M.F. and World Bank initiative eliminated a significant portion of Third World debt, much of which is, if not odious, then at least really dislikable.

A post-Saddam regime could certainly cut a similar deal with its creditors, but that would still stick Iraq with a substantial burden of debt. Perhaps Saddam's successors should turn theory into practice and, when the time comes, repudiate the debts that Saddam incurred to stock his arsenal and maintain his power. That would vastly improve Iraq's economic prospects, and establish a worthy precedent: lend to tyrants, and you will get stiffed. The U.S., at least, is unlikely to object—two of Iraq's biggest creditors are Russia and France.

—*James Surowiecki*



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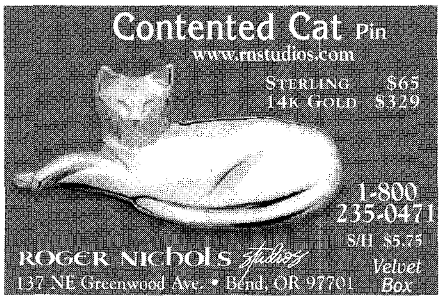

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LETTER FROM BAGHDAD

ILL WINDS

Tomahawks, bunker busters, and dust storms afflict the Iraqi capital.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

During the first three days of the bombardment of Baghdad, the explosions came only at night. After that, there was some daylight bombing, but mostly away from the center or on the outskirts of the city. On the sixth day of the attacks, March 25th, another *turab*, or dust storm, engulfed Baghdad. Yellow dust was mixed with smoke billowing from dozens of oil fires that had supposedly been set to reduce visibility for American and British pilots. The sky turned a blackish purple, as if the city were enduring a nuclear winter. By then, you could hear explosions at all hours of the day and night. Sirens sounded, and about twenty minutes later there would be a short series of noises: big, reverberating, crashing roars that rolled into a gritty rumble. Sometimes the bombs fell nearby, and sometimes it sounded as if they were far away. There must have been a pattern to the bombing, but it wasn't apparent to me. Thunderclaps seemed to fall randomly on this or that part of the darkened landscape.

The mood in the streets was muted. People seemed to have resigned themselves to their fates, the way people in the Caribbean do before a tropical storm hits. In the beginning, they had been full of nervous energy and were out buying and selling things, making last-minute preparations. Soldiers and gun-toting Mukhabarat agents stood on street corners and next to newly dug trenches. But when the *turab* came, civilians went indoors, and the soldiers seemed to disappear into the murk. Strong winds whipped the date palms, tore the branches off trees, and rattled shop signs. Most of the stores were shuttered. Downtown, on Sadoun Street, only a few places were open: a couple of cheap and cheerful kebab houses, a pharmacy or two, and, curiously, a luggage shop.

Sunset occurred ahead of time on the twenty-fifth, like a black curtain dropping suddenly, well before 5 P.M. Half an hour later, the curtain ascended briefly and a few fat raindrops fell, turning the dust-caked surfaces of cars muddy. Sirens blared briefly around eleven o'clock, just as a moist fog rolled in. The air smelled curiously like dirt, and it was so dark that even where there were street lights you couldn't see much beyond a couple of blocks.

Bombs were being dropped somewhere outside the city. We had been told that advance units of the invading force had come within fifty miles of Baghdad, and American B-52s, which had been flying round-the-clock sorties out of England for the past several days, were bombing the Republican Guard forces at the city's southern perimeter. There was almost no sound at night except for the bombs, and the hum of a generator in a building close by. No people's voices, no dogs barking. Once or twice, I heard a car's tires sweep along the wet road outside my window.

I had had a pain in my lower back that morning, and I went to a hospital for some physical therapy. The therapist, a congenial man named Nabil, gave me heat treatments and applied some pulses of electricity. There didn't seem to be any other patients on the ward. Nabil asked me if I was planning to stay in Baghdad, and when I said yes he laughed and said, "*Al Hamdulillah*," which translates, more or less, as "Glory to God," meaning that one's fate is out of one's hands. I had heard the phrase frequently in recent days. Nabil said that he was married and had children. They weren't taking the new situation very well. "You know how it is," he said. "Small children don't understand. For men, it's O.K. But it's hard for women and children." Later, I sat in an office with several doctors, discussing the progress of the war. One of them, a British-trained surgeon, a fastidious man who spoke excellent English, said he'd talked on the telephone with a colleague at a hospital in

A young victim of the explosion in the Al Sha'ab neighborhood in Baghdad on March 26, 2003. Photograph by Sungsu Cho.

GAMMA-PRESSE

Basra. The news was bad. British troops were exchanging artillery fire with the city's defenders, and there were many dead and wounded civilians. "They thought this would be a cakewalk—that's the American term, isn't it?—but it has not been," he said. There was a tone of rebuke in his voice, but he left it at that. Another doctor asked me if I knew what was going to happen, and I said that I didn't know any more than he did, although it seemed that Iraq's leader planned to force the Americans and the British to kill so many Iraqi civilians that the war would become untenable and an international outcry would force them to call a halt. The doctors listened and nodded, and an attendant brought us tea.

The next morning, Baghdad was coated in yellow dust. It looked almost as though snow had fallen. The storm had died down a bit, but there was a cold wind and an intermittent drizzle, so the dust became mud, then dust again, in a miserable ritual. People were wearing kaffiyeh head scarfs as masks to cover their mouths and noses. The Iraqi Radio and Television Building, about half a mile away from our hotel, the Palestine, had been bombed that night. Around 3 A.M., another journalist had called my room to see if my television was working. I checked, and there was only white fuzz on the screen. A few hours later, people were huddled in the hotel lobby watching Iraqi news on the television there. An emergency transmitter had apparently been spared in the attack.

I went to the hospital for another back treatment and chatted and drank Turkish coffee with the doctors. At about eleven-thirty, we heard two distinctive short, sharp explosions that seemed to come from a part of the city a couple of miles to the north of us. A few moments later, there was a gust of wind, and a burst of cool air came into the room. "The sandstorm is coming back," one of the doctors said. I asked him how he knew, and he sniffed the air. "You can smell it," he said. "It smells like earth." This had a special significance for him. "Whenever I smell this, it reminds me of dead people," he said. "Think about it. Think of Iraq's history. What is that history but thousands of years of wars and killing? This is something we have always done rather well, and a lot of, right back to Sumerian and Babylonian times. Millions of people have died on this earth and become part of it. Their bodies are part of the land, the earth we are breathing."

At about 2 P.M., I stopped by the press center at the Ministry of Information, an ugly brown concrete building with antennas and anti-aircraft guns on the roof. Journalists were milling around in a confused manner, and then began piling on board a couple of buses. Press-bus trips are usually inspection tours of freshly bombed sites involving civilian casualties. We are never shown damage done to military installations, or to buildings in the Presidential complex. There is little advance warning of these tours, and rarely any information given about the destinations. Minders or ministry officials merely hint about going to see a school or a hospital or a bomb site.

I got on a bus. The *turab* had resumed with full force, and it was raining. We drove slowly north through the city on the main road leading out of Baghdad toward Kirkuk. Along the way, we passed several oil fires burning in pits dug in the road's wide median strip. After about twenty minutes, the buses pulled into a working-class neighborhood of grubby apartment buildings with ground-floor workshops in the Al Sha'ab district. A large throng of men and boys had gathered on both sides of the road. Sections of some buildings were scorched, the windows of others were broken, and façades were pitted and blasted. The ground looked shorn, as if a great pair of clippers had come along and taken off the top layer of earth. Twisted strips of aluminum siding lay everywhere. The siren of an approaching police car wailed.

Knots of people were moving in a kind of frenzy of shocked curiosity from one place to another, picking their way with caution through debris. There was a crater in the road where a bomb had hit. The tarmac had been torn outward from it in a striated pattern. A family carried furniture and other belongings out of their apartment in one of the buildings and loaded them onto a small truck. I saw what I thought was a bouquet of white carnations on the sidewalk, but it was a pair of dead chickens. Men stared wordlessly into the ripped-out interiors of workshops, the contents hurled and tossed and twisted about as if by a tornado. A car had been smashed and turned upside down. A group of men stood around one of several completely blackened, carbonized vehicles and began singing and dancing. Some of them held up Kalashnikovs and recited a chant that has become standard at Baghdad's bombing sites, especially when TV crews arrive: "Long live Saddam, we will sacrifice ourselves for you." They also shouted epithets against Bush and Blair.

I crossed the boulevard through six lanes of slow-moving traffic. Another bomb had hit the roadside there, leaving a shallow pit. There was a lot of rubble—broken plaster and mortar and more aluminum siding. Two men in their late teens were standing nearby. One of them began dry-heaving. His friend took him by the arm and led him away. A few feet from them a couple of dozen men who had gathered in a circle were looking at something. I pushed my way through the crowd and saw a hand, severed below the knuckles, sitting grotesquely on a green metal window shutter that had fallen on some steps. The hand was thick and gray, and its red-and-white guts, at the messily severed stump, spilled out like electrical circuitry from a cut cable. One young man crouched very close to it, his face just a couple of feet away. He stayed there, staring, for a long time. Someone told me that a man's brain was sitting on the floor just inside the nearest workshop door, but I didn't go to look at it.

I walked away and fell into conversation with a pleasant-faced young man who stood by himself on a pile of rubble. He spoke a little English, and he explained that he was a student at the College of Arts at Baghdad University. He was in the English Department, he said, proudly. He asked me where I was from. When I told him the United States, he said, still smiling politely, "Welcome." We shook hands. He explained that he had not been there when the bombs struck; he had come over from his home, several blocks away. Quite a few people, maybe as many as thirty, he estimated, had died, several of them in their cars. There were a dozen or so destroyed vehicles, on both sides of the street. The dead included an entire family of five, he said, pointing to the scorched-looking apartment directly above us. The bodies had already been taken to the morgue, and the many wounded had been taken to hospitals.

BLACK SEA

One clear night while the others slept, I climbed
the stairs to the roof of the house and under a sky
strewn with stars I gazed at the sea, at the spread of it,
the rolling crests of it raked by the wind, becoming
like bits of lace tossed in the air. I stood in the long
whispering night, waiting for something, a sign, the approach
of a distant light, and I imagined you coming closer,
the dark waves of your hair mingling with the sea,
and the dark became desire, and desire the arriving light.
The nearness, the momentary warmth of you as I stood
on that lonely height watching the slow swells of the sea
break on the shore and turn briefly into glass and disappear . . .
Why did I believe you would come out of nowhere? Why with all
that the world offers would you come only because I was here?

—*Mark Strand*

Another man, a little older, approached me. He, too, spoke some English. He told me his name was Muyad, and that he was a "librarian." I think he meant that he had a store that sold stationery supplies, because he explained that he sold school copybooks and also ran a photocopy machine. He pointed diagonally across the street, to the next block, where he said he lived. I asked him if he knew any of the victims. He nodded yes, and gestured toward one of the blackened cars. A mechanic had been underneath it when it was hit: "His name was Abu Sayaff. He was my friend." I nodded in sympathy. "Bush and Blair . . . They said this would be a clean war," Muyad said. He smiled tentatively. "This is not clean. This is dirty—a dirty war." He was still smiling, and he asked where I was from. "America," I said. He turned away for an instant, then looked back at me. I told him I was sorry about what had happened. "Don't be sorry," he replied. "It's not the American people. Most of them are against this war. We know this." And then he added, apparently by way of explanation, "I saw the director Michael Moore on TV yesterday." He had been watching the Oscar ceremony. Muyad said that he saw a lot of American movies, which was how he had learned to speak English.

We spoke about the war for a few more minutes, exchanging ideas about how it would end, and then we said goodbye. A young man stopped me and pointed to my rear pocket, where I had stuck my notebook, and then up at the sky, indicating the muddy rain. He was trying to tell me that my notes were getting smeared. I thanked him, and he said "*Afwan*," which means, more or less, "You're welcome."

My room at the Palestine Hotel was prepped for the bombing by a colleague, Paul McGeough, of the Sydney *Morning Herald*. Paul had been in Baghdad during the bombing in 1991, and so he came prepared. He sent my driver, Sabah, out to buy masking tape, and every glass surface in the room—the mirrors, the television screen, and even the framed prints of a French Impressionist painting and a drawing of old Baghdad—is now covered with great pink Xs. (Sabah could find only pink tape.) The vertical strips and crossbars look uncannily like the Union Jack. The sliding glass doors onto the balcony are plastered with a herringbone pattern of Xs. "If a bomb hits, you won't get cut to pieces," Paul said. He took apart the two single beds and placed their bases in an L shape, to provide a protective bulwark between the balcony and the mattresses, which he laid end to end on the floor. I keep my laptop on the desk, permanently connected to a satellite phone. The flat, book-shaped antenna of the satphone sits on a yellow plastic milk crate on a ledge beneath the balcony parapet. It is propped up at the correct angle for the East Atlantic Inmarsat satellite. People on the other side of the building use the Indian Ocean satellite. Everything is held down with pink masking tape.

The Palestine Hotel has, to all intents and purposes, become the public face of the regime, or what remains of it. Since it was assumed that the headquarters of the Foreign Ministry and the Information Ministry would be bombed, very few people remained to take care of business there. Press conferences by senior figures in the government are usually held either at the Palestine or at the Sheraton, which is next door, or sometimes at a small building next to the Information Ministry. One of the most high-profile press conferences in Baghdad was held at the Sheraton on March 24th, the fifth day of the war, by Tariq Aziz, the deputy prime minister. Aziz's appearance squelched rumors that he had been killed in the "decapitation" missile strike a few days earlier.

Tariq Aziz is a small man who struts like a bantam cock. He was wearing a military uniform and a beret, and he appeared very cheerful and confident. He sat at a table on a raised platform, in front of a large, gilt-framed portrait of Saddam Hussein. An unshaved bodyguard wearing a kaffiyeh scarf around his neck stood under the portrait, and there were several other bodyguards standing on the floor below the table. Aziz made the usual claims about the motives of the United States and Great Britain and noted that America had been hijacked by a small group of Jews and Christians, the oil lobby, and the military-industrial complex. He gloated about the fight the Iraqis were putting up, and about the Bush Administration's apparent miscalculations regarding strategy. "The Iraqi people are united under Saddam Hussein and the Arab Baath Socialist Party," he said. "We've been leading this country for decades."

An air-raid siren started up, but Aziz ignored it, and told the story of the peasant who had allegedly brought down an Apache helicopter gunship with an ancient rifle. "With his old Czech BRNO gun—made before the time of Havel and the others—he used it to welcome the Americans," Aziz said. "Not with music, not with flowers. He had no instruments, just the gun, and he used it in the best Iraqi way, to welcome the invaders." A reporter asked Aziz how the regime intended to defend Baghdad. "Stay in Baghdad and you'll see," he replied, and got up to leave. We were locked in the room for several minutes so that we couldn't see which way he went.

The *turab* died down during the night following the Al Sha'ab bombing, and the next day was crisp and bright. Baghdad was still covered with pale-yellow dust, but already, here and there, people had emerged to clean up, throwing pails of water over their cars, their shop fronts, and the sidewalks outside their homes. Downtown, some businesses reopened, and traffic and people were once again on the streets. But, with the majority of the shopkeepers and their families having evacuated to outlying villages or towns even farther away,

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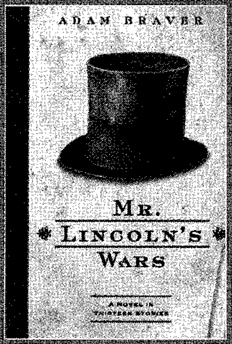

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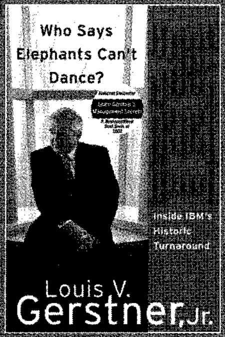
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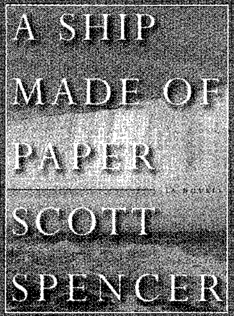

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most of Baghdad's commerce consisted of farmers selling produce on the sidewalks. Men stood behind piles of freshly harvested onions, lettuce, beetroot, potatoes, eggplants, and tomatoes, grown in the welter of patchy gardens that are visible in vacant lots and the odd tilled field all over the city.

Rural life persists tenaciously in the heart of Baghdad. Vegetables are grown a block away from the Ministry of Information, and, somewhere very near the Palestine Hotel, there is a donkey who brays loudly several times a day. In the early hours of the morning, I hear roosters crowing. Baghdad is big and sprawling and not really "urban" in the conventional sense, except for the downtown area. There are a few ten-to-twenty-story ministry buildings and hotels, such as the Palestine and the Sheraton, on Abu Nawas Street, but most of Baghdad consists of low, single-family town houses and stumpy three-to-five-story apartment blocks.

Most of the city's big buildings, such as Saddam's two great mosques, which are still under construction, and his grandiose palaces and monuments to war and to himself, lie to the west of the Tigris, and a good many of those have been transformed into ruined hulks. Many bombed buildings have caved in on themselves, with wreckage spilling out onto the streets or with their insides torn to shreds but the basic structure intact. The Al Rashid Hotel was still standing at the end of last week, for instance, but, right next to it, a small building that I was told had been a police computer center had been entirely flattened, its concrete slabs crunched down onto one another like a sandwich. Across the street, another large building, which supposedly housed a department of the secret police, had been hit. It had been disembowelled by warheads that entered it through the roof. Several apartment blocks just next to it were practically untouched: their sides were lightly sprayed by the dust of the explosion, and they were missing a few windowpanes.

The people of Baghdad adapted to the new reality of war, which consisted of the steady bombing of buildings associated with Saddam Hussein and his power, but not, by and large, with themselves—although the Al Sha'ab bombing was a foretaste, most people believed, of what was to come, and their trepidation was confirmed two days later, when another bombing caused even more civilian casualties. The news that the invasion was slowing down, and the reappearance of Saddam and Tariq Aziz and their defiant promises to bloody the American and British invaders when they arrived in Baghdad, indicated that there would be a prolonged siege.

The day after the Al Sha'ab bombing, I saw two large explosions in the distance, near Saddam's ornate Sajida Palace—with the four huge bronze busts of Saddam wearing Saladin's helmet—which was already partly destroyed. Moments earlier, Sabah had gone off in that direction to find us some food; when he returned, about an hour later, he said he had been driving near the palace when the bombs hit, and the concussion had made his car leap several centimetres off the road. Not long afterward, Paul McGeough, who was in a room facing south, saw what looked like a heat-seeking anti-aircraft missile shoot out of the neighborhood next to us and twirl into the sky.

In the afternoon, a bomb hit the big Al Doura fuel depot in the southern suburbs. That evening, many more bombs were dropped, including one that hit a building in the Presidential complex across from our balcony. Not many people in Baghdad slept well that night. The bombs continued to fall all over the city until just after dawn, when there was a phenomenal explosion that rocked buildings downtown, including the Palestine. "Bunker busters" and missiles had hit communications facilities. We went to inspect the Al Alwiya telephone exchange, about three blocks from the hotel. Viewed from the front, the building appeared to be untouched. But at the back there was a great hole where it had been ripped open; several of its floors were exposed, and their contents had spilled onto the street. The bomb had penetrated into its bowels, carving a pit some thirty feet down and creating a slagheap of broken masonry and twisted metal. A persistent ringing noise that seemed familiar came from somewhere deep inside. It took a moment or two to realize that it sounded like a disconnected telephone, but much, much louder. It was as if a hundred phones had been left off their hooks. ♦

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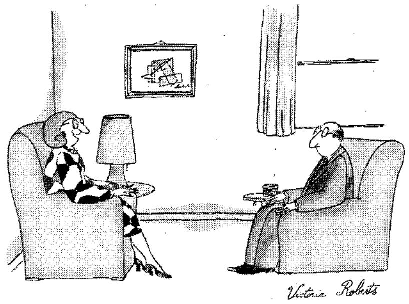

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ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

The battle between Donald Rumsfeld and the Pentagon.

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

As the ground campaign against Saddam Hussein faltered last week, with attenuated supply lines and a lack of immediate reinforcements, there was anger in the Pentagon. Several senior war planners complained to me in interviews that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his inner circle of civilian advisers, who had been chiefly responsible for persuading President Bush to lead the country into war, had insisted on micromanaging the war's operational details. Rumsfeld's team took over crucial aspects of the day-to-day logistical planning—traditionally, an area in which the uniformed military excels—and Rumsfeld repeatedly overruled the senior Pentagon planners on the Joint Staff, the operating arm of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "He thought he knew better," one senior planner said. "He was the decision-maker at every turn."

On at least six occasions, the planner told me, when Rumsfeld and his deputies were presented with operational plans—the Iraqi assault was designated Plan 1003—he insisted that the number of ground troops be sharply reduced. Rumsfeld's faith in precision bombing and his insistence on streamlined military operations has had profound consequences for the ability of the armed forces to fight effectively overseas. "They've got no resources," a former high-level intelligence official said. "He was so focussed on proving his point—that the Iraqis were going to fall apart."

The critical moment, one planner said, came last fall, during the buildup for the war, when Rumsfeld decided that he would no longer be guided by the Pentagon's most sophisticated war-planning document, the TPFDL—time-phased forces-deployment list—which is known to planning officers as the tip-fiddle (tip-fid, for short). A TPFDL is a voluminous document describing the inventory of forces that are to be sent into battle, the sequence of their deployment, and the deployment of logistical support. "It's the complete applecart, with many pieces," Roger J. Spiller, the George C. Marshall Professor of military history at the U.S. Command and General Staff College, said. "Everybody trains and plans on it. It's constantly in motion and always adjusted at the last minute. It's an embedded piece of the bureaucratic and operational culture." A retired Air Force strategic planner remarked, "This is what we do best—go from A to B—and the tip-fiddle is where you start. It's how you put together a plan for moving into the theatre." Another former planner said, "Once you turn on the tip-fid, everything moves in an orderly fashion." A former intelligence officer added, "When you kill the tip-fiddle, you kill centralized military planning. The military is not like a corporation that can be streamlined. It is the most inefficient machine known to man. It's the redundancy that saves lives."

The TPFDL for the war in Iraq ran to forty or more computer-generated spreadsheets, dealing with everything from weapons to toilet paper. When it was initially presented to Rumsfeld last year for his approval, it called for the involvement of a wide range of forces from the different armed services, including four or more Army divisions. Rumsfeld rejected the package, because it was "too big," the Pentagon planner said. He insisted that a smaller, faster-moving attack force, combined with overwhelming air power, would suffice. Rumsfeld further stunned the Joint Staff by insisting that he would control the timing and flow of Army and Marine troops to the combat zone. Such decisions are known in the military as R.F.F.s—requests for forces. He, and not the generals, would decide which unit would go when and where.

The TPFDL called for the shipment in advance, by sea, of hundreds of tanks and other heavy vehicles—enough for three or four divisions. Rumsfeld ignored this advice. Instead, he relied on the heavy equipment that was already in Kuwait—enough for just one full combat division. The 3rd Infantry Division, from Fort Stewart, Georgia, the only mechanized Army division that was active inside Iraq last week, thus arrived in the Gulf without its own equipment. "Those guys are driving around in tanks that were pre-positioned. *Their* tanks are sitting in Fort Stewart," the planner said. "To get more forces there we have to float them. We can't fly our forces in, because there's nothing for them to drive. Over the past six months, you could have floated everything in ninety days—enough for four or more divisions." The planner added, "This is the mess Rumsfeld put himself in, because he didn't want a heavy footprint on the ground."

Plan 1003 was repeatedly updated and presented to Rumsfeld, and each time, according to the planner, Rumsfeld said, " 'You've got too much ground force—go back and do it again.' " In the planner's view, Rumsfeld had two goals: to demonstrate the efficacy of precision bombing and to "do the war on the cheap." Rumsfeld and his two main deputies for war planning, Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, "were so enamored of 'shock and awe' that victory seemed assured," the planner said. "They believed that the weather would always be clear, that the enemy would expose itself, and so precision bombings would always work." (Rumsfeld did not respond to a request for comment.)

Rumsfeld's personal contempt for many of the senior generals and admirals who were promoted to top jobs during the Clinton Administration is widely known. He was especially critical of the Army, with its insistence on maintaining costly mechanized divisions. In his off-the-cuff memoranda, or "snowflakes," as they're called in the Pentagon, he chafed about generals having "the slows"—a reference to Lincoln's characterization of General George McClellan. "In those conditions—an atmosphere of derision and challenge—the senior officers do not offer their best advice," a high-ranking general who served for more than a year under Rumsfeld said. One witness to a meeting recalled Rumsfeld confronting General Eric Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, in front of many junior officers. "He was looking at the

Chief and waving his hand," the witness said, "saying, 'Are you *getting* this yet? Are you *getting* this yet?'"

Gradually, Rumsfeld succeeded in replacing those officers in senior Joint Staff positions who challenged his view. "All the Joint Staff people now are handpicked, and churn out products to make the Secretary of Defense happy," the planner said. "They don't make military judgments—they just respond to his snowflakes."

In the months leading up to the war, a split developed inside the military, with the planners and their immediate superiors warning that the war plan was dangerously thin on troops and matériel, and the top generals—including General Tommy Franks, the head of the U.S. Central Command, and Air Force General Richard Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—supporting Rumsfeld. After Turkey's parliament astonished the war planners in early March by denying the United States permission to land the 4th Infantry Division in Turkey, Franks initially argued that the war ought to be delayed until the troops could be brought in by another route, a former intelligence official said. "Rummy overruled him."

Many of the present and former officials I spoke to were critical of Franks for his perceived failure to stand up to his civilian superiors. A former senator told me that Franks was widely seen as a commander who "will do what he's told." A former intelligence official asked, "Why didn't he go to the President?" A Pentagon official recalled that one senior general used to prepare his deputies for meetings with Rumsfeld by saying, "When you go in to talk to him, you've got to be prepared to lay your stars on the table and walk out. Otherwise, he'll walk over you."

In early February, according to a senior Pentagon official, Rumsfeld appeared at the Army Commanders' Conference, a biannual business and social gathering of all the four-star generals. Rumsfeld was invited to join the generals for dinner and make a speech. All went well, the official told me, until Rumsfeld, during a question-and-answer session, was asked about his personal involvement in the deployment of combat units, in some cases with only five or six days' notice. To the astonishment and anger of the generals, Rumsfeld denied responsibility. "He said, 'I wasn't involved,'" the official said. "'It was the Joint Staff.'"

"We thought it would be fence-mending, but it was a disaster," the official said of the dinner. "Everybody knew he was looking at these deployment orders. And for him to blame it on the Joint Staff—" The official hesitated a moment, and then said, "It's all about Rummy and the truth."

According to a dozen or so military men I spoke to, Rumsfeld simply failed to anticipate the consequences of protracted warfare. He put Army and Marine units in the field with few reserves and an insufficient number of tanks and other armored vehicles. (The military men say that the vehicles that they do have have been pushed too far and are malfunctioning.) Supply lines—inevitably, they say—have become overextended and vulnerable to attack, creating shortages of fuel, water, and ammunition. Pentagon officers spoke contemptuously of the Administration's optimistic press briefings. "It's a stalemate now," the former intelligence official told me. "It's going to remain one only if we can maintain our supply lines. The carriers are going to run out of JDAMs"—the satellite-guided bombs that have been striking targets in Baghdad and elsewhere with extraordinary accuracy. Much of the supply of Tomahawk guided missiles has been expended. "The Marines are worried as hell," the former intelligence official went on. "They're all committed, with no reserves, and they've never run the LAVs"—light armored vehicles—"as long and as hard" as they have in Iraq. There are serious maintenance problems as well. "The only hope is that they can hold out until reinforcements come."

The 4th Infantry Division—the Army's most modern mechanized division—whose equipment spent weeks waiting in the Mediterranean before being diverted to the overtaxed American port in Kuwait, is not expected to be operational until the end of April. The 1st Cavalry Division, in Texas, is ready to ship out, the planner said, but by sea it will take twenty-three days to reach Kuwait. "All we have now is front-line positions," the former intelligence official told me. "Everything else is missing."

Last week, plans for an assault on Baghdad had stalled, and the six Republican Guard divisions expected to provide the main Iraqi defense had yet to have a significant engagement with American or British soldiers. The shortages forced Central Command to "run around looking for supplies," the former intelligence official said. The immediate goal, he added, was for the Army and Marine forces "to hold tight and hope that the Republican Guard divisions get chewed up" by bombing. The planner agreed, saying, "The only way out now is back, and to hope for some kind of a miracle—that the Republican Guards commit themselves," and thus become vulnerable to American air strikes.

"Hope," a retired four-star general subsequently told me, "is not a course of action." Last Thursday, the Army's senior ground commander, Lieutenant General William S. Wallace, said to reporters, "The enemy we're fighting is different from the one we war-gamed against." (One senior Administration official commented to me, speaking of the Iraqis, "They're not scared. Ain't it something? They're not scared.") At a press conference the next day, Rumsfeld and Myers were asked about Wallace's comments, and defended the war plan—Myers called it "brilliant" and "on track." They pointed out that the war was only a little more than a week old.

Scott Ritter, the former marine and United Nations weapons inspector, who has warned for months that the American "shock and awe" strategy would not work, noted that much of the bombing has had little effect or has been counterproductive. For example, the bombing of Saddam's palaces has freed up a brigade of special guards who had been assigned to protect them, and who have now been sent home to await further deployment. "Every one of their homes—and they are scattered throughout Baghdad—is stacked with ammunition and supplies," Ritter told me.

"This is tragic," one senior planner said bitterly. "American lives are being lost." The former intelligence official told me, "They all said, 'We can do it with air power.' They believed their own propaganda." The high-ranking former general described Rumsfeld's approach to the Joint Staff war planning as "McNamara-like intimidation by intervention of a small cell"—a reference to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and his aides, who were known for their challenges to the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Vietnam War. The former high-ranking general compared the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Stepford wives. "They've abrogated their responsibility."

Perhaps the biggest disappointment of last week was the failure of the Shiite factions in southern Iraq to support the American and British invasion. Various branches of the Al Dawa faction, which operate underground, have been carrying out acts of terrorism against the Iraqi regime since the nineteen-eighties. But Al Dawa has also been hostile to American interests. Some in American intelligence have implicated the group in the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, which cost the lives of two hundred and forty-one marines. Nevertheless, in the months before the war the Bush Administration courted Al Dawa by including it among the opposition groups that would control postwar Iraq. "Dawa is one group that could kill Saddam," a former American intelligence official told me. "They hate Saddam because he suppressed the Shiites. They exist to kill Saddam." He said that their apparent decision to stand with the Iraqi regime now was a "disaster" for us. "They're like hard-core Vietcong."

There were reports last week that Iraqi exiles, including fervent Shiites, were crossing into Iraq by car and bus from Jordan and Syria to get into the fight on the side of the Iraqi government. Robert Baer, a former C.I.A. Middle East operative, told me in a telephone call from Jordan, "Everybody wants to fight. The whole nation of Iraq is fighting to defend Iraq. Not Saddam. They've been given the high sign, and we are courting disaster. If we take fifty or sixty casualties a day and they die by the thousands, they're still winning. It's a jihad, and it's a good thing to die. This is no longer a secular war." There were press reports of mujahideen arriving from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Algeria for "martyrdom operations."

There had been an expectation before the war that Iran, Iraq's old enemy, would side with the United States in this fight. One Iraqi opposition group, the Iraqi National Congress, led by Ahmed Chalabi, has been in regular contact with the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI, an umbrella organization for Shiite groups who oppose Saddam. The organization is based in Iran and has close ties to Iranian intelligence. The Chalabi group set up an office last year in Tehran, with the approval of Chalabi's supporters in the Pentagon, who include Rumsfeld, his deputies Wolfowitz and Feith, and Richard Perle, the former chairman of the Defense Policy Board. Chalabi has repeatedly predicted that the Tehran government would provide support, including men and arms, if an American invasion of Iraq took place.

Last week, however, this seemed unlikely. In a press conference on Friday, Rumsfeld warned Iranian militants against interfering with American forces and accused Syria of sending military equipment to the Iraqis. A Middle East businessman who has long-standing ties in Jordan and Syria—and whose information I have always found reliable—told me that the religious government in Tehran "is now backing Iraq in the war. There isn't any Arab fighting group on the ground in Iraq who is with the United States," he said.

There is also evidence that Turkey has been playing both sides. Turkey and Syria, who traditionally have not had close relations, recently agreed to strengthen their ties, the businessman told me, and early this year Syria sent Major General Ghazi Kanaan, its longtime strongman and power broker in Lebanon, to Turkey. The two nations have begun to share intelligence and to meet, along with Iranian officials, to discuss border issues, in case an independent Kurdistan emerges from the Iraq war. A former U.S. intelligence officer put it this way: "The Syrians are coördinating with the Turks to screw us in the north—to cause us problems." He added, "Syria and the Iranians agreed that they could not let an American occupation of Iraq stand." ♦

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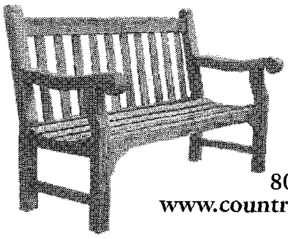

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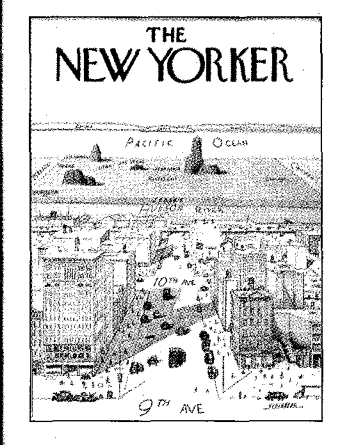

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REFLECTIONS

THE ANGLOPHONE EMPIRE

Can occupation ever work?

BY AMITAV GHOSH

During the past few months, much has been said and written on the subject of a "new American empire." This term, however, is a misnomer. If the Iraq war is to be seen as a kind of imperial venture, then the project is neither new nor purely American. What President Bush likes to call the "coalition of the willing" is dominated, after all, by America, Britain, and Australia—three English-speaking countries whose allegiances are rooted not just in a shared culture and common institutions but also in a shared history of territorial expansion. Seen in this light, the alignment is only the newest phase in the evolution of the most potent political force of the last two centuries: the Anglophone empire.

I am an Indian, and my history has been shaped as much by the institutions of this empire as by a long tradition of struggle against them. Now I live in New York; for me, the September 11th attacks and their aftermath were filled with disquieting historical resonances. I was vividly reminded, for example, of the Indian uprising of 1857, an event known to the British as the Great Indian Mutiny. That year, in Kanpur, a busy trading junction beside the Ganges, several hundred defenseless British civilians, including women and children, were cut down in an orgy of blood lust by Indians loyal to a local potentate, Nana Sahib. Many of the Indians involved in the rebellion were erstwhile soldiers of the empire who had been seized by nihilistic ideas. The rebels' methods were so extreme that Indian moderates were torn between sympathy, revulsion, and fear. Many Indians chose to distance themselves from the uprising. Others went so far as to join hands with the British in the two violent years that followed the rebellion. A similar process is clearly under way in today's Middle East, where Islamist fundamentalism has inflamed some Arabs while alienating others.

The phrase "shock and awe," used by the United States military to describe the initial aerial attack on Baghdad, provided another reminder of the 1857 uprising in India. In the aftermath of the mutiny, the British mounted a campaign to create terror and awe among rebel forces throughout the Indian subcontinent. The road from Kanpur to Allahabad was lined with the corpses of Indian soldiers who had been hanged; there were public displays of rebels being shot from cannons. British soldiers sacked cities across the north of India. The instruments of state were deployed in such a way as to reward allies and punish areas and populations that had supported the rebels. The effects of these policies were felt for generations and can, arguably, still be observed in the disparities that divide, say, the relatively affluent region of Punjab and the impoverished state of Bihar.

The right and wrong of the British actions are not at issue here. Nor do I want to overstate the analogy to the present circumstances; the "coalition of the willing" is clearly not going to use nineteenth-century methods in Iraq. I want, rather, to pose a question that is not articulated often enough: Do such acts of power work? Many believe that displays of military might are always erased or offset by countervailing forces of resistance. But those who are accustomed to the exercise of power know otherwise. They know that power can be used to redirect the forces of resistance.

In the case of the 1857 uprising, the truth is that the reigning power's brutal response resulted in some significant changes in Indian political life. Britain's overwhelming victory was instrumental in persuading a majority of Indians that it was futile to oppose the empire with an armed struggle. This consensus led many in the next generation of anti-colonialists to turn in a more parliamentary and constitutionalist direction, and was the necessary backdrop to Mahatma Gandhi's tactics of nonviolent resistance.

Some of today's imperial enthusiasts have pointed to Indian democracy as proof that a colonial presence can be reconstructive, helping to create a stable civil society. To counter this argument, however, one need only look at a list of cities where Al Qaeda's fugitive leaders are said to have taken refuge: Aden, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Quetta, Lahore, Karachi. The British ruled these cities for many years, and yet the antagonism toward the West that simmers in them now is greater even than it was in 1857.

In the world of human beings, even defeat is a transaction. If there is any lesson to be drawn from the subcontinent's experience of empire, it is that defeat can be negotiated in many different ways. In India, democracy thrives, while in Pakistan democracy has consistently devolved into authoritarianism. For Iraq to go the way of India, the current avatar of the Anglophone empire will have to succeed in creating, in the span of a few years, what earlier incarnations failed to do over decades.

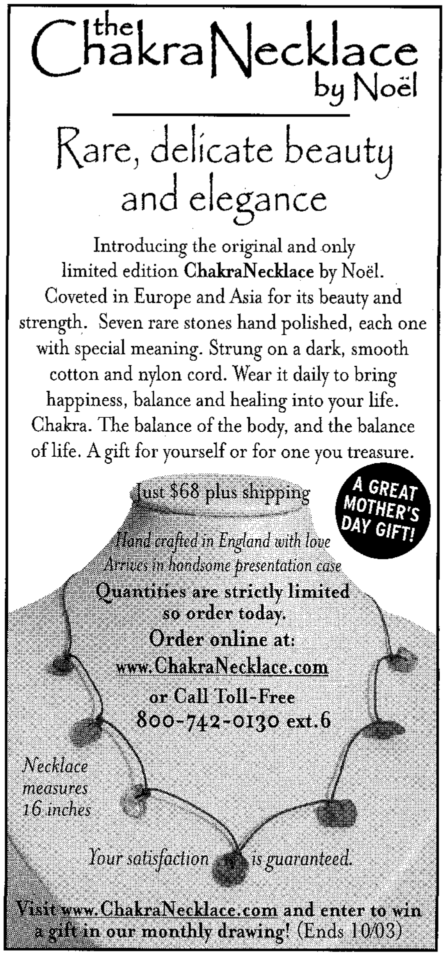
The chances of success are close to nil. The strongest counterindications can be seen, paradoxically, in the very imbalance in military power which will likely lead to the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime. The military power of the United States is so overwhelming that it has caused America's leaders to forget that the imperial project rests on two pillars. Weaponry is only the first and most obvious of these; the other is persuasion. When the empire was in British hands, its rulers paid almost as much attention to this second pillar as to the first. Its armies were often accompanied by an enormously energetic apparatus of persuasion, which included educational institutions, workshops, media outlets, printing houses, and so on. British teachers, doctors, civil servants, and other functionaries spent long periods living in Indian towns and villages, while soldiers were generally contained within barracks.

Many hawks in the United States now openly admit to a veneration of past empires, yet they seem to have absorbed the military lessons of imperialism to the exclusion of all else. I suspect this is the reason that many in the British political establishment were so dismayed by the buildup to the Iraq war. They know all too well that an aura of legitimacy and consent is essential in matters of empire.

Legitimacy and the tactics of persuasion are obviously not high priorities for the Bush Administration. But the task would be difficult anyway. In the nineteenth century, the apparatus of persuasion was effective partly because the colonizing force could exercise close control over the flow of information. In Iraq, every effort at persuasion will be offset by daily doses of dissuasion, delivered through the Internet and satellite channels like Al Jazeera. The persuasive effectiveness of nineteenth-century empires also rested in large part on the talismanic role of science. Today, high technology is too widespread to astonish. Although smart bombs are terrifying, they do not have the mystique that the Gatling gun once held.

The modern connotations of the word "empire" also show how the context of imperialism has changed. For many, especially in America, it is a reminder of an image that played a significant part in discrediting the Soviet Union: the "evil empire." This is not a purely rhetorical anxiety; the unease goes deeper than that. A substantial proportion of America's population remains unconvinced of the need to undertake a new version of a "civilizing mission." This is what distinguishes America from the imperial nations of the past.

As George Orwell and many other observers of imperialism have pointed out, empires imprison their rulers as well as their subjects. In today's America, where people are increasingly disinclined to venture beyond the borders, this has already come to pass. But perhaps, in these accelerated times, it won't be long before most Americans begin to long for an escape from the imprisonment of absolute power. ♦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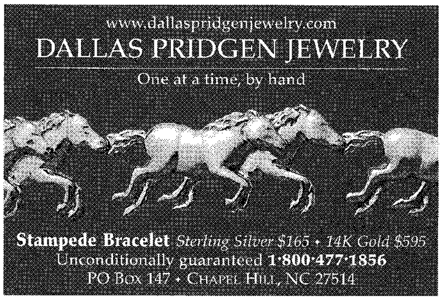
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LETTER FROM NORTHERN IRAQ

WAITING AT THE FRONT

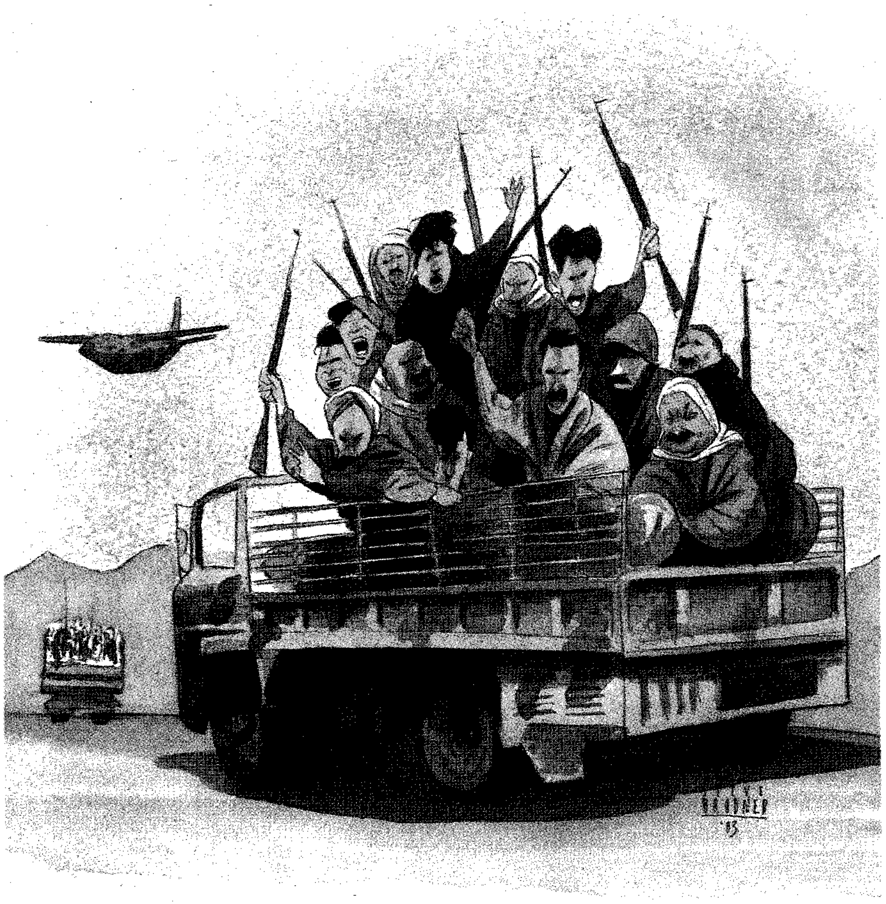
The mood among the Kurds is one of anticipation—and fear.

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

Last week, on a freezing night in a blacked-out bunker outside Halabja, a city in the mountains of northeastern Iraq, the officers of a Kurdish guerrilla unit drank tea and laid out in vivid detail what they would do to President Bush if he fell into their hands. "I would kiss him one thousand times," the company commander, Sheikh Fattah, said. "I would carry him on my shoulders and shout songs to him," another officer, Farouk Khaled, added. "I would sacrifice one thousand sheep and two thousand chickens for him," a third officer, Mam Siamand, said.

These salutes to Bush—very much unlike the sort of thing that is said about the President elsewhere in Iraq and in the rest of the world—went on for some time. The guerrillas fall under the command of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, or P.U.K., the enthusiastically pro-American party that controls most of the eastern sector of Kurdish Iraq, or Kurdistan. They are known as *peshmerga*, or "those who face death," and they were happy yet anxious; the night before, American cruise missiles had struck the positions of the two Islamist groups who control the territory a half mile to the east. It was midnight, and I was told by *peshmerga* leaders that a second round of missile attacks would begin in about three and a half hours.

The targets include the Ansar al-Islam, who number as many as eight hundred. Among them are about a hundred and fifty so-called Arab Afghans, some of whom are believed to have trained in the Al Qaeda camps of Afghanistan. The P.U.K. and several American intelligence officials say that Ansar al-Islam is sponsored by the regime of Saddam Hussein, although others have disputed this claim. The second organization, which is known as the Komala Islami, is said to be more moderate but still Islamist in outlook; that inclination separates it from the mass of Iraqi Kurds, who generally pay little mind to the more stringent demands of Islamic law. Some Kurds were upset that in the bombing the Komala Islami had suffered more than Ansar; nearly all the Ansar men had escaped injury. Ansar al-Islam took its revenge shortly after the attack, when one of its men exploded a car bomb at a *peshmerga* checkpoint, killing six people, including an Australian TV cameraman, Paul Moran, and wounding several others. The bomb was powerful enough to obliterate the taxi in which the Ansar bomber rode. A patch of charred ground marked the spot of Moran's death.



The fighters have a seemingly solid faith in the United States, despite the past record.

STEVE BRODNER

I had arrived at the *peshmerga* headquarters not long after the car bombing, to have dinner with Mustafa Said Kadir, the P.U.K. commander. Kadir, who is in his forties and is a thin-faced man with downcast eyes, holds the rank of general, but the *peshmerga* are an informal group, even for mountain guerrillas, and his men wandered in and out of the cold, unfurnished communications room as he spoke.

The headquarters was formerly an Iraqi Army base, and it had not had a new coat of paint or a vigorous cleaning in some time. Our dinner of greasy rice and flatbread was interrupted twice by Kadir's deputy, Sheikh Mustafa Jafar, who came in and whispered something in Kurdish to Kadir. The commander immediately left the room. In these brief absences, a guerrilla entered, silently picked up our plates, and motioned to my translator and me to follow him to another room. After Kadir returned the second time, I asked him, "I'm not the only American here, am I?"

"No," he replied, with a narrow smile. Early last week, it was rumored in

Sulaimaniya, the regional capital, that American Special Forces soldiers were on the ground in Kurdistan, and that they were helping the *peshmerga* plan the fighting against Ansar, but their presence was still officially secret. The *peshmerga* are eager to please the American military and want to create smooth relations with the men they see as their saviors. "We will be better allies to America than the Israelis or the Kuwaitis—and especially the Turks," Kadir said.

Like most Kurdish officials, Kadir, though not given to shows of emotion, could not contain his satisfaction that Turkey had damaged its standing in the United States by refusing to let the Americans establish a base for a northern front there. In the crowded gallery of enemies of the Kurds, Saddam stands at the front, but Turkey, which has suppressed, sometimes with great brutality, expressions of separatism and ethnic pride among its more than thirteen million Kurdish citizens, is a runner-up.

Kadir would not reveal how many Americans were working with the *peshmerga*, but their number was said to grow as the week progressed, and American planes were landing nearly every night at a recently improved airstrip outside Sulaimaniya. (In mid-week, in preparation, apparently, for the opening of the northern front, roughly a thousand American paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade landed at the Harir airfield, in the western zone of Kurdistan. The operation is reportedly also meant to discourage any troop movement by Turkey into the region.)

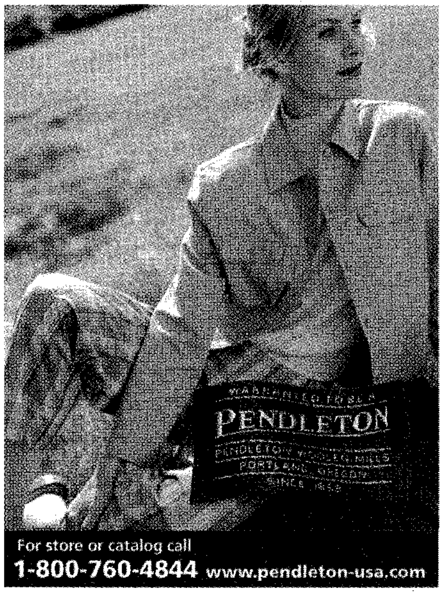
Kadir did explain that, when it comes time for a ground attack on the Ansar enclave, the *peshmerga* would lead the charge; *peshmerga* spies were already looking for men who had taken to hiding in the caves around the Shiram mountain. "We have people inside who get information out through relatives, and we have defectors," Kadir said. As we spoke, Jafar came into the room and reported that a group of Ansar men had been seen hiding in a gully near the village of Beyara, which is under Ansar al-Islam's control. Kadir disappeared, presumably to tell the Americans.

When he returned, he spoke about his twenty-three years as a guerrilla, during which he fought not only Saddam's regime but also a rival Kurdish party, which controls the western zone. Though the Kurds have a reputation for ferocity, Kadir showed no love for arms. "I don't want to do this," he said, pointing to his AK-47, which was propped against the wall. "I'd rather be a civilian."

He stays in uniform, he said, because of his memories of Saddam's torture chambers. In 1990, two years after the end of the genocide campaign waged against the Iraqi Kurds by the forces of Saddam and his Baath Party (according to Kurdish investigations, as many as two hundred thousand Kurds died in this campaign, which is known as al-Anfal, or "the spoils," after a passage in the Koran; Human Rights Watch estimates that the toll was between fifty thousand and a hundred thousand), Kadir was smuggled into the city of Mosul, which has a large Kurdish population, to reorganize the P.U.K.'s network of underground cells. He was subsequently captured by the regime's intelligence service and imprisoned; he was beaten with steel cables across the legs and back, and was given electric shocks to his genitals. His friends, he told me, suffered other punishments. "One man was fat, and they cut the meat off his legs and put salt in the wounds," he said. Another was laid out on a table and strapped, belly down. "They ironed his back with a hot iron," he said. A prisoner with tuberculosis was forced to spit blood into the mouths of other prisoners.

The Americans fear that the Kurds, and other Iraqis, will take revenge on their Baath Party oppressors when the regime is defeated, but Kadir said, "Revenge isn't personal." He went on, "We will be happy just to be rid of Saddam. The *peshmerga* know that that day is coming. I see it in the shape of their faces. They smile all the time. They know the Americans are coming."

It is virtually impossible to find anyone in Kurdistan who is opposed to the war against Saddam's regime. People on street corners ask for American flags or photographs of George Bush; the appreciation of the United States extends to the intellectual class. Sherko Bekas, who was described to me as Kurdistan's unofficial poet laureate, was particularly upset by the well-publicized efforts of



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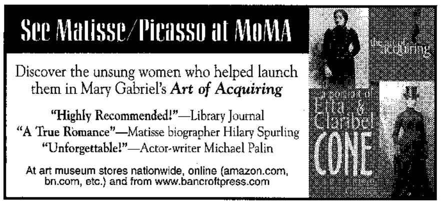

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American poets to stop the war. "Saddam is the god of war," Bekas said, when I saw him in his office at a publishing firm in Sulaimaniya. "He is the killer of poetry." He went on, "I say to these poets that if they lived for two weeks under Saddam's rule they would write verse in reverse. They would write poems asking Bush to attack Saddam sooner."

I met with Jalal Talabani, the P.U.K. leader, in his well-guarded compound on a hill in Sulaimaniya. He was ebullient. "We are waiting for our liberators," he said. Talabani, the shrewd senior statesman of the Iraqi opposition, stands to gain power in a post-Saddam Iraqi government. I left his compound with Barham Salih, his Prime Minister, who manages the day-to-day affairs of the P.U.K. portion of Kurdistan. Salih is a forty-three-year-old technocrat, an English-educated engineer who served until recently as the P.U.K. representative in Washington. He told me that he had never seen Talabani so excited. Kurdish leaders believe that the era of their political impotence is coming to an end; they do not believe that they're close to the Kurdish dream of a fully independent state, but they think they will soon help to determine how Iraq is governed. "We will not be disenfranchised," Salih said.

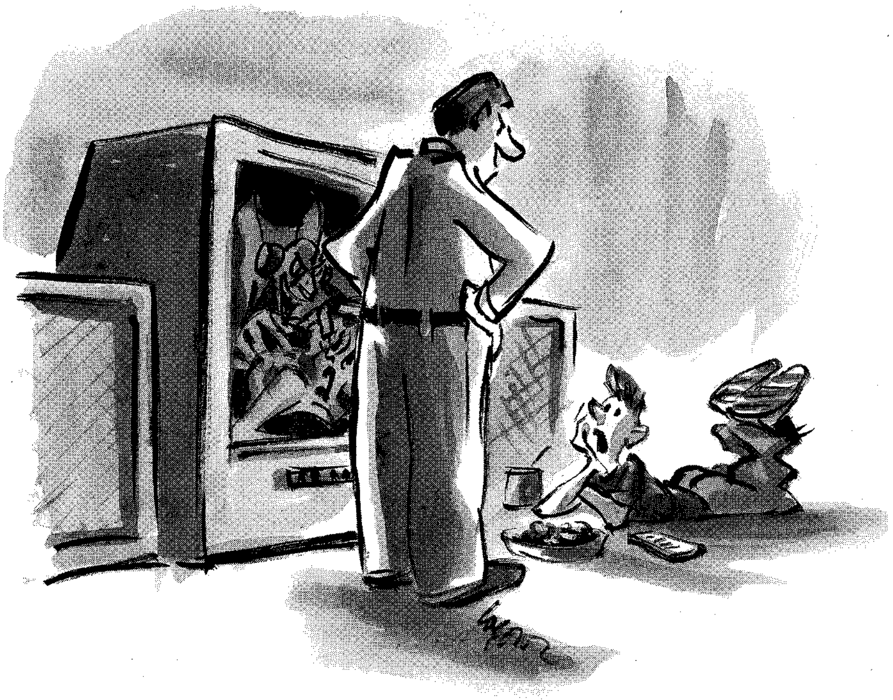
Though Kurdish officialdom is obsessively watching television news—Al Jazeera, the Arab satellite channel, is widely viewed, and widely despised—Kurdish leaders, at least officially, are not distressed by the pace of the war effort, which is far more troubled than many had expected. "Things have to be viewed in context," Salih said late last week. "We would like to have seen Saddam out by now, but the American military is only fifty miles from Baghdad. There are people around Saddam who have nothing to lose and so will fight hard, but they will be defeated."

Back at *peshmerga* headquarters, on the night after the first wave of cruise-missile attacks on the Islamist groups, it was time to move. I was allowed to travel in a small convoy of Nissan Patrols and "gunships"—Toyota pickups whose beds were outfitted with anti-aircraft guns. The convoy left the compound with headlights switched off and set out for *peshmerga* forward positions. We passed through the village of Anab. Fifteen years ago, in an Iraqi chemical attack on Halabja, many of the Kurds who had escaped the initial bombardment sought shelter in the Anab mosque. According to the local *peshmerga*, the Halabjans who took refuge there were killed when the Iraqi Air Force attacked the area with chemical weapons. All told, roughly five thousand people were killed in the chemical attack on Halabja.

Outside Anab, our convoy came under mortar fire from Ansar positions in the hills. We drove at high speed, often veering, to the forwardmost bunkers of the *peshmerga*, which were situated behind a sheltering hill. *Peshmerga* artillery batteries, in a valley below, opened fire, and the two sides battled with cannon and mortars, apparently without lethal effect, for ten minutes. Then the guns went silent. I saw more than a hundred *peshmerga* at the front line, most of whom carried AK-47s and were weighed down by ammunition clips; three of them also carried Soviet-made rocket-propelled grenade launchers. I saw no weapons heavier than a .50-calibre machine gun.

Sheikh Fattah, the commander, greeted me, and led me into a concrete building that served as his sleeping quarters. He told me that in December the P.U.K. had lost forty-three *peshmerga* while killing twenty-three Ansar al-Islam men. He also said that Ansar al-Islam is adept with mortars and small artillery. The *peshmerga* I met seemed eager to perform heroic deeds, but their training did not always match their desire; some of their weapons were quite dirty, and a few of the men, especially the older ones, chain-smoked and were winded by mountain patrols. I asked a group of them if they believed they would soon be given the order to attack. "*Insha'a* Bush," one said, as the others laughed. Bush has replaced Allah in the traditional expression *Inshallah*, or "God willing."

We waited for the anticipated cruise-missile attack, the follow-up to the first night's strike, and it came soon enough, first a low rumble, then a muffled explosion and a flash of orange, in the shape of a suddenly rising sun. The *peshmerga* cheered. They are frightened by Ansar al-Islam, and sometimes let their fear show.



"Sorry, Pop, but your message is no longer relevant to the younger audience."

By the end of the week, it was still not known how many people, if any, had died in that night's attack. An Ansar defector I met, a twenty-one-year-old half-Arab, half-Kurd named Nizar Ahmed Muhammad, who was in Ansar territory during the American bombings, said that his commanders, as well as the rank and file, were shaken by the missile strikes, and they were arguing among themselves about how best to prepare for a ground assault. "The men who are single and without children are prepared to die," Muhammad said. Those with families, he suggested, are plotting their escape, probably across the Iranian border. Muhammad said that he had defected because he found Ansar's beliefs increasingly deviant from Islam. He blamed the Arab Afghans for this extremism. Women in the Ansar villages are gloved and veiled in the Taliban style, and Ansar men are forbidden to cut their hair. He said he also opposed the suicide ethos of the group. "I was told by my commander to blow myself up, but I told him, 'Why don't you go blow yourself up?' " he said. "He got very angry."

Ansar continued to mount attacks against *peshmerga* targets through the week. Two days after my visit to Anab, four Ansar men approached the Anab forward bunker and threw hand grenades inside, killing one *peshmerga* and wounding several others. The *peshmerga* killed three of the Ansar men; later, the P.U.K. director of security said that two of them had been identified, with the help of Ansar captives in Kurdish prisons, as Afghanistan-trained Jordanians of Palestinian extraction, in the employ of Mussa'ab al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi is believed by European intelligence sources to be Al Qaeda's main specialist in chemical and biological terrorism. (American officials could not be reached for comment on this allegation.)

When the grenade attack occurred, I was in the town of Chamchamal, to the west, along the border between the Kurdish zone and Iraqi-controlled territory. The town, a dusty place of muddy roads and low buildings that are variously brown or cinder-block gray, has been mostly abandoned. At the beginning of the war, its citizens had fled to villages in the interior of Kurdistan, fearing, as most Kurds fear, a repetition of the Iraqi chemical attacks. Chamchamal had become the location of an international press jamboree; S.U.V.s emblazoned with the letters "TV," written in duct tape, moved constantly through the town. Rumors of an imminent American ground attack circulated regularly. Some of the journalists who had posted themselves to Chamchamal had, since the killing of Paul Moran, stripped off the duct tape, leaving it only on the roof, where it could be seen by American and British aircraft. The Kurds welcome journalists, though it is not uncommon to see them voicing their disapproval of Jacques Chirac to French reporters.

Until late in the week, the Iraqi Army—or, at least, several of its vehicles—was visible atop a ridge above Chamchamal; on the day I was there, an American air strike had just taken place, and in the distance Iraqi soldiers could be seen carrying away several wounded men. The reporters were waiting for a decisive American attack on the forward ridge, which would open the road to Kirkuk, a city that is rich in both oil and ethnic tension. Kurdish leaders and intellectuals regard Kirkuk, which was once the ancient Assyrian trading center of Arrapkha, as their Jerusalem, and their professions of love for the city have intensified as thousands of its Kurdish citizens have been expelled by the Iraqi regime to the Kurdish-controlled regions of the country.

This campaign of ethnic cleansing, known in the Iraqi regime as "Arabization," has left Kurds a minority in Kirkuk, and many of the houses that belonged to Kurdish residents have been handed over to Arab Iraqi families. Barham Salih, the Prime Minister in Sulaimaniya, refers to these families as "Arab settlers." The Kurds who are allowed to stay in Kirkuk are often forced by the Baghdad regime to undergo a process called "nationality correction," in which they take Arab names and renounce their ethnicity.

A great fear of military planners—and a particular fear of Turkey's—is that an open road to Kirkuk would be an irresistible temptation for the Kurds who lost their homes in the Arabization campaign. Kirkuk is not close to Turkey, but the Turks are said to worry that a Kurdish capture of Kirkuk would only increase nationalism among their own Kurds. This is the principal reason, Kurds say, that Turkey threatens to send its troops into northern Iraq, a move that the Turkish Army chief of staff, General Hilmi Ozkok, said last week would not happen. “This is not our war,” he was quoted as saying, although Kurdish officials I spoke to late in the week continue to doubt Turkey’s intentions.

The belief that Kurds might spontaneously swarm into Kirkuk is not unfounded. One night in a Chamchamal house in which I was staying, along with a news crew from NBC, Rozzgar Ali Hamajan, the governor-in-exile of Kirkuk, stopped by. An NBC producer, Babak Behnam, asked him who he thought would become governor of Kirkuk, once the Americans arrived. “Whoever gets to Kirkuk first will be the governor,” Hamajan said. He was laughing, but he didn’t seem to be joking. “Seriously, if the Americans give me orders to do it, I’ll do it,” he added. Hamajan believes that Kirkuk should be the capital of a Kurdish state in a federalized Iraq.

Among the Chamchamal residents who have remained is Karim Agha, the chief of the Kurdish Hamawand tribe. Agha, who is seventy-six, is tall but stooped; he wore a turban, and had several days of stubble. He described the Hamawands’ ancient war with the Turks. The Hamawands, who are said to number roughly four thousand families in this part of Kurdistan, are legendary for their pride and for their disgruntlement. In that way, Agha, despite his personal charm, did not disappoint. He had nothing good to say about the Turks—or about Arabs and Persians—and he thanked God that the American Administration seemed to be coming out from under the thrall of Turkey.

In the late nineteenth century, the Hamawands refused to be suppressed by the Ottoman troops of Sultan Abd al-Hamid II. “The Hamawand fought them the guerrilla way,” Agha said. We were seated in his drafty sitting room, while servants brought us small cups of coffee. “When everyone else had stopped fighting the Turks, we were fighting,” he said. The reward for Hamawand recalcitrance was expulsion. “The Sultan pushed us out. They took seven hundred families to Turkey, all the sick and old people dying in the road.”

“It’s so nice out. Let’s go do something weather-related.”

Other Hamawands were deported to Libya and Morocco, Agha said, but “they refused to stay. Over several years, they fought their way, on foot, back to Kurdistan. We would join with Bedouin tribes and fight other tribes, and then we would get horses and weapons. They would go by the stars, at night.”

I asked Agha if the Kurds, who are famously hard to govern—it is not just the Turks and Saddam Hussein who have had difficulty subduing them—would react well to the presence of American troops. He smiled, and said, “The Americans are coming as liberators, not as occupiers.” He cited history. “President Wilson said we should have a state,” he said, referring to a declaration contained in Wilson’s Fourteen Points that the Kurds, among other non-Turkish nationalities, should be granted self-determination. “The Europeans stopped him. Why do the Europeans behave this way? Look at all that America has done for Europe.”

The Kurds’ seemingly impregnable faith in America is grounded mainly in desperation—they are largely friendless in the world—and in a kind of pure hope that America will behave in Wilsonian fashion after the war ends. There is little in the actual American record that would give Kurds reason for optimism. In 1975, Henry Kissinger and the Shah of Iran withdrew their support for an anti-Baghdad Kurdish insurgency; and in 1991, after the first Gulf War, when President George H. W. Bush called upon Iraq’s Kurds and Shiites to rise up against Saddam, American help was denied when they needed it most. Beyond official Kurdish circles, one hears doubts about America’s staying power, a peculiar reversal of what is said across most of the Middle East: a fear not that the United States will remove Saddam Hussein but that it won’t.

Hania Mufti, an official with Human Rights Watch who has wide experience in Iraq, told me last week, when we met in Sulaimaniya, that during a tour she made of Kurdistan last fall “one of the constant themes we heard was support for the war.” But she also heard the fear expressed that "the Bush Administration wouldn't go through with it."

Late last week, as the American attack seemed to bog down in the south, Kurdish officials appeared unworried. The P.U.K.'s minister of agriculture, Shalaw Ali Asqari, a former *peshmerga* commander, said, "We look at the experience in Afghanistan. After six days, everyone said that America was going to lose. But you didn't."

Still, ordinary people sounded concerned that Saddam would manage to avoid what they hoped would be his fate. One of them was Hallawa Rasheed, a woman I had met last year during a visit to Shoresh, a district in Chamchamal where the P.U.K. has built compounds to house women and children who are known here as "Anfal widows"—the wives of the tens of thousands of Kurdish men rounded up by Saddam's regime in the Anfal campaign. Her story is a common one. In April of 1988, Iraqi troops surrounded her village, forced its residents into trucks, and took them to the Topzawa army base, near Kirkuk. There the Iraqis separated the men from the women and children. One night, the men were herded onto trucks and driven away, never to be heard from again. According to human-rights groups, the men were probably shot and buried in the desert. The women were eventually released, but could not go home; their village, like roughly four thousand other Kurdish villages, had been bulldozed by the Iraqi Army. Soon after the first Gulf War, the Kurds, who had established an autonomous government under the American- and British-patrolled no-fly zone, built neighborhoods like Shoresh for the Anfal widows.

I saw Hallawa Rasheed again last week, in her concrete-block house in Shoresh. Many of her neighbors had fled; the house sat perhaps a thousand yards from the Iraqi Army-controlled ridge, and our conversation was interrupted twice by the thunderclap of American bombs falling nearby. Rasheed is in her seventies; she has a wrinkled face, hennaed hands, and a single tooth. She lost two sons to the Anfal, and was not perturbed, she said, by conventional violence; only the thought of chemical attack made her fearful—and the notion that America would quit before removing Saddam. "Let the Americans bomb, God thank them," she said. "I would kill Saddam with my teeth if I had teeth," she added, as her daughters laughed. Rasheed and her daughters—as well as several other women who joined our conversation—said that they prayed the attack on Iraq would go well, and they believed that President Bush would deliver news of their sons and husbands.

They may never learn what happened. I spoke in Sulaimaniya with Eric Stover, the director of the Human Rights Center at the University of California at Berkeley, who is the author of a report on the Anfal, "Unquiet Graves." Stover calls the Anfal executions the "Iraqi Babi Yar," and he told me that, while conditions in the desert may help preserve the remains, locating the burial sites would depend on finding Iraqi documents or officials with first-hand knowledge of the Anfal. Despite the odds, he said, he is sure that the Anfal widows will look for answers until their death. "There's no greater force on earth than a mother or a father looking for a missing child," he said.

On Thursday, events turned hopeful for the people in this part of Kurdistan. The Iraqi troops positioned along the ridge overlooking their homes fled toward Kirkuk, and Kurds from Chamchamal took over the bunkers and pushed their lines halfway to Kirkuk. On Friday, the *peshmerga*, with their American advisers, invaded Ansar territory, quickly reaching Beyara, on the Iranian border. On Friday night, I was with Talabani, the P.U.K. leader, when Kadir, the *peshmerga* commander, called him to report that the *peshmerga* had killed dozens of Ansar men. "This is great news," Talabani said. "You should be commended." Kadir also told Talabani that six *peshmerga* had been killed and that no Americans had been killed or injured. But this was a small battle in a small corner of Iraq, far from Baghdad. Hallawa Rasheed told me that as soon as she hears news of Saddam's defeat she will leave with her daughters for the southern desert, to look for her sons. ♦

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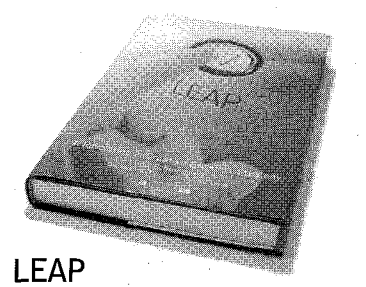

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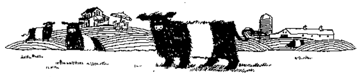

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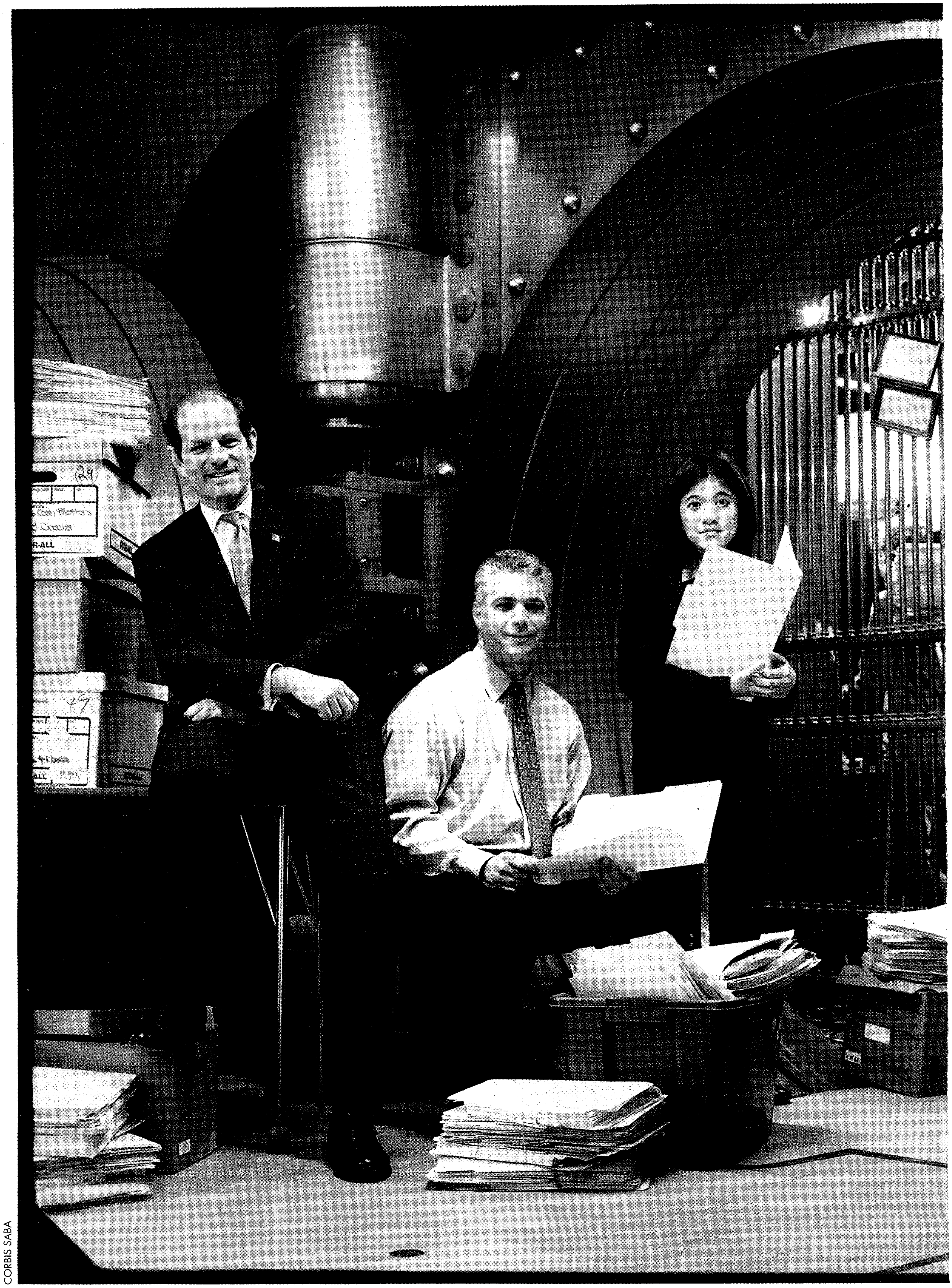
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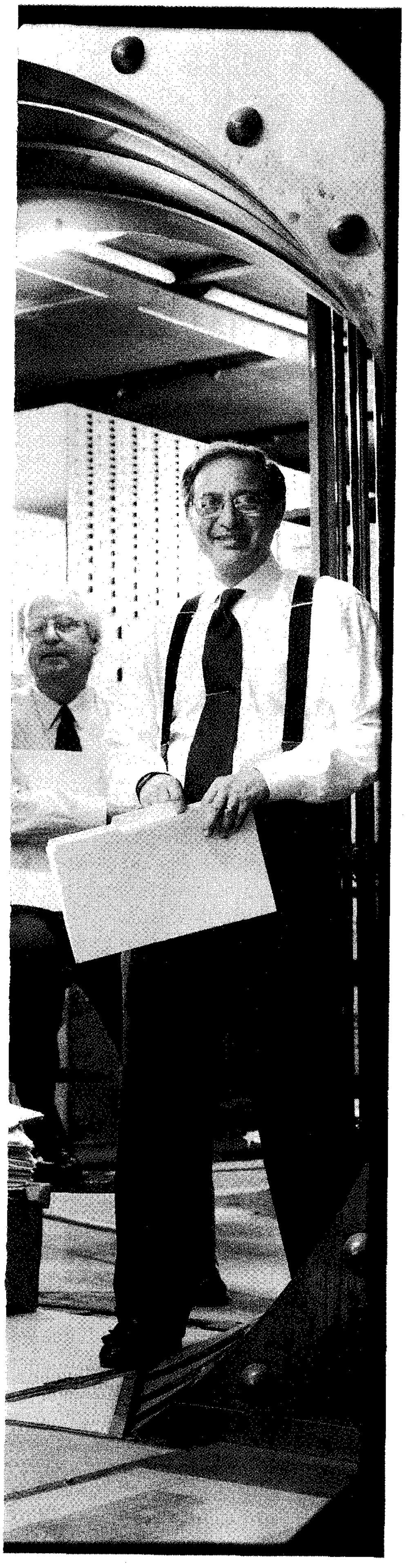


ANNALS OF FINANCE

THE INVESTIGATION

How Eliot Spitzer humbled Wall Street.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

Toward the end of 2000, Eric Dinallo, the head of the investor-protection bureau in the New York State Attorney General's office, was talking with his father, Greg Dinallo, a novelist, about the stock market. Investors had already lost billions of dollars, and Greg, who had written episodes of "Quincy, M.E." and "The Six Million Dollar Man" before turning to thrillers, was complaining about Wall Street analysts who kept "buy" recommendations on technology and Internet stocks even though so many of them were plummeting. "When analysts recommend these stocks, what is their interest in it?" he asked. Eric, an athletic thirty-nine-year-old, with short, spiked gray hair, thought this was a good question. The investor-protection bureau existed to protect the interests of ordinary investors. Traditionally, it had targeted individual fraudsters and "boiler rooms" that pumped up penny stocks, but there was no reason it couldn't investigate big Wall Street firms. On January 12, 2001, Dinallo sent a memorandum to his boss, Eliot Spitzer, listing his department's priorities in the coming year. At the top of the list he wrote, "Investigation of abuses by investment advisors." The next entry was "Investigation of investment banking firm analysts."

Dinallo had joined the Attorney General's office at the start of 1999, shortly after Spitzer, a Democrat, defeated the Republican incumbent, Dennis Vacco, in a bitter contest that was resolved only after a recount. Previously, Dinallo had worked in the Manhattan District Attorney's office, where he took part in the successful prosecution of senior executives from A. R. Baron, a crooked brokerage firm. It was, perhaps, surprising for an ambitious young prosecutor to leave the Manhattan D.A.'s office for the Attorney General's investor-protection bureau, but Dinallo knew that Spitzer, the son of a wealthy real-estate developer, had grand ambitions for himself and his office.

Spitzer was thirty-nine when he defeated Vacco, on a Clintonian platform of cleaning up the environment, controlling the spread of guns, and supporting the death penalty. During Spitzer's first two years in office, he had sued power-plant operators in Ohio and elsewhere, for sending air pollution to New York; General Electric, for failing to clean up the Hudson River; and several leading gun manufacturers, for selling unsafe products. Spitzer liked to bait conservative audiences by telling them that his activist agenda was an outgrowth of "federalism," the right-wing legal movement that advocated the use of state courts, rather than federal courts, to resolve many big issues. At the start of 2001, Spitzer was looking for some bold new initiatives, and he approved Dinallo's idea of taking a closer look at stock analysts.

During the nineteen-nineties, an unprecedented number of Americans had entrusted their money to the stock market, and some had ended up losing heavily. Many Wall Street firms had used the promise of supposedly independent research to draw the public into the market. Some firms even set up mutual funds exclusively devoted to technology and Internet stocks, which they promoted with the aid of their star analysts.

As a young prosecutor without close political ties to the financial industry, Spitzer was well placed to launch a populist crusade. "Most people on the Street knew that the issue of analysts and investors was a festering sore," Spitzer said recently. "People had talked about it, but nobody had ever done anything." If there is one thing Spitzer dislikes, it is inaction. Ever since boyhood, he has been

Spitzer, at far left, with members of his team: Eric Dinallo, Patricia Cheng, Gary Connor, and Bruce Topman. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

competitive and hyperactive. In conversation, he perches his long, angular body on a chair and leans forward, fixing his bright, blue-gray eyes on his interlocutor, as if awaiting the starter’s pistol. Although sometimes accused of being a publicity hound, he could hardly be described as a media pretty boy. His chin is prodigious; his teeth are imperfect; his nose is impressive; his brow is furrowed; his hair is receding; and his ears are like jug handles. But he fairly radiates energy and ambition.

Initially, Spitzer had no idea where the analyst inquiry might lead. “It was just one of many investigations,” he recalled. “There was no premonition that this was a more important case. It was like everything else. You say, ‘Let’s see where it takes us.’ ”

As the top legal official in New York State, Eliot Spitzer heads a sprawling bureaucracy that employs more than eighteen hundred people in offices ranging from Buffalo to Hauppauge. His headquarters takes up eleven floors at 120 Broadway, a grand old office building between Cedar Street and Pine Street which once served as the headquarters of the Equitable Life Assurance Society. The investor-protection bureau, on the twenty-third floor, is one of seven bureaus in the public-advocacy division.

With Spitzer’s approval, Dinallo hired Bruce Topman, a sixty-year-old Wall Street attorney, to lead the analyst investigation. During a long career as a litigator, Topman, a slight, dapper fellow who wears French cuffs and suspenders to the office, had defended dozens of firms against the government. Now that his children had left college, he didn’t need to earn as much money, and he decided to do something public-spirited. When he arrived at 120 Broadway, he was struck by the disparity of resources between the public and the private sectors. Big Wall Street firms have hundreds of lawyers. The investor-protection bureau employed just ten, and Topman was assigned two of them: Gary Connor, a fifty-five-year-old office veteran, and Patricia Cheng, a thirty-four-year-old expert in information retrieval. Fortunately for Topman, they were determined investigators. “It turned out to be a good combination,” Connor said. “Bruce had experience of litigating securities cases. Pat is a computer wizard. And I had experience with the Martin Act.”

The Martin Act is an obscure but powerful New York statute that dates back to 1921. Under its auspices, the Attorney General can bring civil or criminal charges against any person or business involved in a fraudulent purchase or sale of securities anywhere within the state. Since the vast majority of stock and bond sales go through Wall Street, the Martin Act gives New York’s Attorney General oversight power over much of the country’s financial industry. During the nineteen-seventies, one of Spitzer’s predecessors, Louis Lefkowitz, used the Martin Act to attack corruption on Wall Street, but in the ensuing years most people on the Street had forgotten that the legislation even existed.

Topman and his colleagues initially focussed on a legal complaint that had been filed with the New York Stock Exchange in March, 2001. Debases Kanjilal, a forty-six-year-old pediatrician living in Jackson Heights, Queens, claimed to have lost half a million dollars by following the investment advice of Henry Blodget, a well-known Internet analyst at Merrill Lynch. Kanjilal had bought stock in a company called InfoSpace at $122 and held on to it even as it dropped below $10. According to his lawyer, Jacob Zamansky, Kanjilal had wanted to sell several times, but a Merrill Lynch broker dissuaded him, citing bullish research reports by Blodget. Zamansky claimed that Blodget had recommended InfoSpace’s stock only because the firm was planning to purchase another company, Go2Net, which was one of Merrill Lynch’s investment-banking clients.

In April, 2001, Topman sent a lengthy subpoena to Merrill Lynch, asking for internal documents relating to Internet initial public offerings, Internet stock recommendations, and the compensation of Internet stock analysts. A couple of months later, he issued a second subpoena, this one asking for information about Merrill’s relationship with GoTo.com (no relation to Go2Net), an Internet-search company that Blodget had recently downgraded. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the downgrade came just hours after GoTo.com chose Credit Suisse First Boston instead of Merrill Lynch to manage an upcoming stock offering. Merrill Lynch denied that the two events were linked, but Topman and Dinallo agreed that the timing was suspicious.

Henry Blodget, whose fair, Waspish features had become familiar to CNBC viewers during the stock-market boom, represented a new breed of stock analyst. As recently as the nineteen-eighties, most people on Wall Street regarded research as a backwater, a view that was reflected in the layout of big investment banks. Analysts generally sat on a floor of their own, well away from the firm’s big money-makers: the traders, who place bets on the direction of market movements; and the investment bankers, who manage stock and bond issues for corporations, as well as advising them on mergers and acquisitions. Physical isolation was just one of the “Chinese walls” that were supposed to separate analysts from other parts of the firm. Internally, the analysts were ranked somewhere between the retail brokers, who buy and sell stocks on behalf of ordinary investors, and the cafeteria staff.

As the nineteen-nineties progressed, this picture changed dramatically. Long-standing restrictions on the financial industry were relaxed, allowing firms of all kinds to join together. Union Bank of Switzerland acquired PaineWebber; Salomon merged with Smith Barney, which was owned by Travelers Group, which then merged with Citicorp. These deals, and many more like them, blurred the traditional line between retail brokerages, such as Merrill Lynch and Dean Witter, which catered principally to the investing public, and investment banks, like Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, which dealt primarily with corporations. The new all-purpose financial supermarkets that resulted from the merger wave, such as Citigroup, J. P. Morgan Chase, and Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, were, in the words of Paul Volcker, a former chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, “bundles of conflicts of interests.”

These conflicts were particularly evident in the burgeoning technology sector, where countless cash-strapped companies were looking to raise money and the big Wall Street banks were competing

"According to your carrier, this little piggy has insurance, but this little piggy has none."

for the business of underwriting their I.P.O.s. In this febrile environment, many leading analysts were taking on roles that had traditionally been reserved for investment bankers, such as helping companies to go public and marketing their stock to investors. For example, when Priceline.com went public, in March, 1999, Richard Braddock, its chief executive, said that the company chose Morgan Stanley Dean Witter to manage its I.P.O. mainly because the firm employed Mary Meeker, a top-ranked Internet analyst. The month after Priceline.com's stock started trading on the Nasdaq, Meeker issued a positive recommendation, which she retained until March, 2002, when the stock had fallen almost ninety-seven per cent from its peak value of $162.

Meeker's career demonstrated how the once lowly analyst had been transformed into what people on Wall Street call a "rainmaker"—a generator of lucrative deals. (For every hundred million dollars that a company raises in an I.P.O., it pays the investment banks that organize the offering seven million dollars in commissions.) Blodget, who is thirty-six years old, emerged as Meeker's main rival, but despite a privileged background his rise to Wall Street fortune was an unlikely one. He grew up on the Upper East Side, where he attended St. Bernard's School. He went to Phillips Exeter Academy, in New Hampshire, and then to Yale, where he majored in history. After graduating in 1988, he taught English for a year in Japan and then wrote a book about his experience, but he was unable to find a publisher. Like many aspiring journalists, he took a series of junior editorial jobs, including one as a fact checker at the National Audubon Society, which let him go after a couple of months, and another as a proofreader at *Harper's*. A person who knew him well at that time describes him as a quiet, withdrawn young man, who was increasingly disillusioned by his failure to make a living as a writer.

In 1994, Blodget took an entry-level position at Prudential Securities, a big retail brokerage. According to some accounts, his father got him the job. Two years later, he joined Oppenheimer & Company, a small brokerage firm, where he went on to become a research analyst covering Internet stocks. In December, 1998, Blodget staged the publicity coup that made his career, by placing a price target of $400 on Amazon.com, which was then trading at about $240, a level that many analysts considered ludicrously overvalued. One of the doubters was Merrill Lynch's Internet analyst, Jonathan Cohen, who reckoned that Amazon's stock was worth just $50. Blodget's timing was better. Within a month, Amazon's stock had surpassed his target, and he was being hailed as an oracle of the New Economy. Early in 1999, Cohen announced his resignation from Merrill Lynch. Blodget took his job.

Under securities laws, the word "document" means all communications in paper and electronic form, including written notes, memos, e-mails, and attachments. Since 2001, the Securities and Exchange Commission, Wall Street's primary overseer, has required firms to save all their e-mails for at least three years, in case regulators want to inspect them. In the early summer of 2001, Merrill Lynch's compliance department started turning over boxes of documents to Spitzer's office. Whenever a new batch came in, Clayton Donnelley, a soft-voiced paralegal, scanned and numbered each document to maintain a permanent record. By the end of the Merrill Lynch investigation, he would be up to 99,439.

Some of the first documents to catch the investigators' attention were e-mails that had originated in the hundreds of brokerage offices that Merrill Lynch maintains across the country. The firm is famous for its "thundering herd" of brokers, who, in advising their clients, rely, in part, on the advice of their colleagues in the research department. When the stock market slumped in 2000 and 2001, these brokers felt the public's anger, some of which they passed on to Blodget.

On June 15, 2000, Scott Jones, a broker based in Austin, Texas, e-mailed Blodget to complain about his coverage of InfoSpace, the company at the center of the investor lawsuit, whose stock was plummeting. "Why do we continue to talk so positively about this stock?" Jones demanded. "I very rarely hear of other analysts talking this stock up. Maybe we should re-evaluate our stance. I am really concerned for our clients."

On July 10, 2000, Michael DeVito, a Merrill Lynch broker in Greenwich, Connecticut, wrote to Blodget, "From your recent reports, it seems that InfoSpace is your favorite stock. Should we worry that the chairman has sold over

1MM shares before their quarterly earnings? Are we planning a secondary for the stock? Any input would be appreciated. As FCs"—financial counsellors—"we rely on your guidance."

Blodget's own e-mails showed that he, too, had concerns. In a message he sent to a colleague in the research department in June, 2000, he admitted that he had "enormous skepticism" about InfoSpace. Yet the following month, a day after Go2Net hired Merrill Lynch to represent it in a possible sale of the company to InfoSpace, he issued a research bulletin reiterating his buy ratings on InfoSpace's stock and declaring, "We continue to believe that InfoSpace has the best technology platform for wireless Internet."

Blodget's support didn't prevent InfoSpace's stock from falling further. In October, 2000, a Merrill Lynch broker in Louisville named Jeff Sexton asked Blodget about a wire story that said InfoSpace's annual report contained handwritten parts. "Before joining Merrill Lynch, I was a securities lawyer for seven years," Sexton wrote. "Shame on me for not doing the due diligence that I and other FCs assume you and other analysts are doing, but a handwritten annual report for a company that you have a buy rating on with a target of $100 is disconcerting to me to say the least." Blodget forwarded this e-mail to one of his subalterns, Virginia Syer, with a note that said, "I am so tired of getting these things. Can we please reset this stupid price target and rip this piece of junk off whatever list it's on. If you have to downgrade it, downgrade it." But, in fact, Blodget didn't downgrade InfoSpace until December 11, 2000—after its purchase of Go2Net had been completed, and after its stock had fallen below $15.

The InfoSpace e-mails provided Bruce Topman and his colleagues with some encouragement. Topman believed that all successful investigations developed what he termed an "entry point," in the form of a coöperative witness, a revealing document, or a recorded conversation. Dinallo also subscribed to the entry-point theory. When he was at the District Attorney's office, he had often used wiretaps as his point of entry, but he viewed e-mails as potentially an even better form of evidence. "E-mails are more direct," he explained. "They are casual, but intimate. People tend to say what they mean without much consideration or artifice. It is like a water-cooler conversation caught on the record. Plus, the context is right there—the back-and-forth, the attachments, everything."

Fortunately for Spitzer's investigators, Blodget and his colleagues turned out to have been frequent and candid online correspondents, partly because they got along so well. "My sense is that people who worked with Henry liked him enormously," one official said. "They liked working with him, and they were loyal to him. From our point of view, that brought a lot of benefits, because it meant there was a fierce exchange of views. People said what they really meant. It was that open channel of communication that gave us a window into what Henry did."

GoTo.com, the subject of Topman's second subpoena, was a California-based company that pioneered the practice of charging firms to be included in its search-engine results. At the peak of the market, this appeared to be a clever idea, but following the Nasdaq crash of April, 2000, GoTo.com found itself running out of cash and unable to issue more stock. In September, 2000, it hired Merrill Lynch to help it raise money from European investors. At that point, Blodget didn't have any rating on GoTo.com's stock, but Thomas Mazzucco, an investment banker in Merrill Lynch's Palo Alto office, promised GoTo.com that this would change, and Blodget told one of his colleagues, Kirsten Campbell, to start researching the company. Campbell spoke with the firm's executives and ran some numbers through her computer. GoTo.com was still making heavy losses, and Internet advertising was in a slump. Not surprisingly, Campbell concluded that GoTo.com didn't deserve a positive recommendation.

Merrill Lynch's stock-rating system was based on a five-point scale: 1—buy; 2—accumulate; 3—neutral; 4—reduce; 5—sell. Each covered stock was ascribed a short-term and a long-term rating. For example, a rating of 2-1 meant short-term accumulate and long-term buy. In November, 2000, Blodget suggested initiating coverage of GoTo.com with a rating of 2-2, but Campbell exploded. "Who are we trying to please by doing a 2-2," she wrote in an e-mail. "I don't want to be a whore for f-ing mgmt. If 2-2 means that we are putting half of Merrill retail into this stock because they are out accumulating it then I don't think that's the right thing to do. We are losing people money and I don't like it. John and Mary Smith are losing their retirement because we don't want Todd"—Todd

"As your chosen autobiographical ghostwriter, let me state up front that if I want any input from you I'll ask for it."

Tappin, GoTo.com's chief financial officer—"to be mad at us."

The internal discussions about GoTo.com continued for several months. At the start of 2001, with the firm's stock trading in the single figures, Campbell proposed initiating coverage at 3-2, but the prospect of a neutral rating pleased neither GoTo.com nor Merrill Lynch's investment bankers. Eventually, a compromise was reached. On January 11, 2001, Blodget initiated coverage with a 3-1 rating: short-term neutral and long-term buy. In an accompanying research report he noted the continued weakness in the online-advertising market but added, "We believe that GoTo will be a survivor." Later in the day, a fund manager at American Express e-mailed Blodget to ask, "What's so interesting about GoTo except banking fees????" Blodget replied, "Nothin."

A few months later, Blodget upgraded GoTo.com to 2-1, citing a stronger than expected first quarter. He also helped to organize a series of meetings between the company's senior executives and institutional investors. Hardly by coincidence, GoTo.com was planning another stock issue, and Merrill Lynch was vying with Credit Suisse First Boston to manage the offering. On May 25, 2001, GoTo.com informed Merrill it was leaning toward Credit Suisse. Later that day, Edward McCabe, another of Blodget's research colleagues, sent him an e-mail saying he had prepared a downgrade for GoTo.com's stock, because of "valuation" concerns. (During the previous month, the stock price had doubled.) Blodget's reply consisted of three words: "beautiful fuk em." Two weeks later, on the same day that GoTo.com officially hired Credit Suisse as the lead underwriter of its upcoming stock issue, Blodget downgraded GoTo.com from 2-1 to 3-1.

When Bruce Topman saw the "fuk em" e-mail, he knew he had found his entry point. From then on, he believed there was a good chance he could make a case against Blodget and Merrill Lynch for failing to disclose the analyst's conflicts of interest.

During the first week of August, 2001, Topman, Connor, and Cheng interviewed Blodget for five days in a conference room at 120 Broadway. Beyond confirming that he hadn't issued a single "reduce" or "sell" rating during his time at Merrill Lynch, the analyst gave little away. He pointed out that he had always described Internet stocks as high-risk investments, and that he had advised investors to keep only a small percentage of their wealth in them. When Topman asked how he decided which stocks to cover, he conceded that he took into account whether Merrill Lynch had an investment-banking relationship with the company, but denied that that was the only factor.

At this stage, Blodget seemed unruffled by the Attorney General's investigation. A few days before his first interview, he e-mailed Campbell, who had also been called to testify about her role in covering GoTo.com. "Based on what I know, there's nothing to be concerned about," he wrote, adding that he considered it "hugely ironic" that they were being investigated over a stock that they had rated neutral: "If ever there was a better example of independent, high-quality research, I don't know what it is." Blodget also tried to reassure Campbell about a recent decision by Merrill Lynch to settle the InfoSpace lawsuit brought by Debases Kanjilal, which had surprised many people on Wall Street. Blodget insisted to Campbell that, contrary to media reports, Kanjilal received only about five per cent of what he was asking for. "The decision to settle was still mystifying to me, given that we haven't done anything wrong, but it is what it is," he went on. "Much of this blame game is to be expected, now that the bubble has burst, but it is still frustrating and annoying, especially given the effort we put into detailing the risks in these stocks."

It is unclear whether Blodget believed what he wrote to Campbell. (He refused to be interviewed for this article.) Although he did warn that Internet stocks were risky, he also luxuriated in his role as their champion. In March, 1999, for example, he published a lengthy report entitled "Overview of Our Investment Philosophy," in which he freely conceded that most Internet stocks were "absurdly expensive" on traditional grounds, and that most Internet companies would not survive. Nonetheless, he declared, "the real risk is not losing some money—it is missing a much bigger upside."

Blodget was calm and polite during the depositions, but his over-all attitude was glib, and this infuriated Spitzer's staff. The investigators had found his e-mails self-deprecating and funny. Their author came across as the wry aspiring writer he once was, rather than the self-important Wall Street multimillionaire he had turned into. But, during the interviews, the investigators started to view him as just another evasive defendant. "Given the e-mails, I expected him to be more candid," one official said. "But he clamped down, and that upset us. That didn't help at all."

The events of September 11, 2001, brought the Blodget case to a virtual standstill. Merrill Lynch was forced to evacuate its offices in the World Financial Center, and the flow of documents to 120 Broadway was interrupted. Spitzer, meanwhile, got involved in coördinating the many charitable efforts that sprang up after the attack, and the analyst investigation didn't get back on track until November.

By then, Blodget's life had changed. In October, he married his longtime girlfriend. A few weeks later, he announced his resignation from Merrill Lynch. "It just seemed like a good time to pursue the next thing," he told the *Times*, adding that he was planning to write a book about the Internet-stock bubble and its dénouement. The resignation had little impact on the investigation. Blodget was still tied to Merrill Lynch through an agreement that covered his legal bills; Dinallo and Topman still had to persuade their boss that they had a case worth pursuing.

As an experienced prosecutor, Spitzer knew what it took to build a strong case. From 1986 to 1992, he was an Assistant District Attorney in the Manhattan D.A.'s office, where he led an investigation into the Gambino crime family's role in the garment industry. To win the trust of people in the business, Spitzer set up a garment factory on the Lower East Side and operated it for several months while collecting wiretaps and other incriminating evidence.

Once he became Attorney General, Spitzer demanded that his investigators display a similar level of diligence and initiative. When he read the evidence relating to InfoSpace and GoTo.com, he doubted that it was strong enough to support a high-profile case against a defendant as well financed and as determined as Merrill Lynch. Some of the e-mails were damning, but none of them amounted to incontrovertible evidence of systemic wrongdoing. Spitzer also thought that the case was too narrow. From the beginning, he had viewed the analyst investigation in a broad context. Although he was outraged by Blodget's behavior, he saw it as symptomatic of the conflicts of interests that had arisen throughout the financial industry, not just at Merrill Lynch. "I kept coming back to the fundamentals: What is it that I'm trying to do here?" he explained recently. "And what I'm trying to accomplish is insuring that when Joe Smith in Utica goes to see his broker and is told, 'Our analyst thinks you should buy this stock,' then Joe Smith is getting advice that is honestly believed."

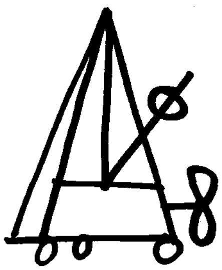
Spitzer likes to think of himself as a defender of ordinary people. His grandparents were Jewish immigrants who lived in a fourth-floor walkup on East Fifth Street. His father, Bernard Spitzer, who is now seventy-eight, went to City College and then to Columbia, where he studied engineering. After working in the real-estate industry for some years, he set up his own firm, Spitzer Engineering, which now operates more than a dozen upscale Manhattan apartment houses (including the Fifth Avenue building where Spitzer lives with his wife, Silda Wall, and three daughters). By the nineteen-seventies, Bernard Spitzer had moved his family—Eliot is the youngest of three children—to a big house in Riverdale, but he often reminded them of their obligations to the less fortunate. At dinner, he would talk to them about serious issues of the day, such as the Vietnam War, which he opposed, and George McGovern's Presidential candidacy, which he supported.

After Horace Mann, Spitzer went to Princeton, where he majored in public policy at the Woodrow Wilson School and served as president of the student government. Princeton at the start of the nineteen-eighties was hardly a hotbed of political activism. Candidates for office included a "Jihad Party," made up of hard-partying frat boys who wore towels and face masks. "It wasn't an office that I recall many people fighting for," one of Spitzer's fellow-students said. "Even without Jihad, the slate would have been pretty thin."

Despite his extracurricular activities, Spitzer was a diligent student. During a course in microeconomics, the insight that markets don't always work efficiently, and that governments sometimes have to step in and impose remedies, made a big impression on him. He remembered it years later when he was investigating the garment industry. Rather than try the Gambinos on extortion charges, which would have been tricky to prove and would, in any case, have left their trucking monopoly intact, he filed an antitrust suit, charging the mobsters with stifling potential competition. In return for avoiding jail, the Gambinos paid a twelve-million-dollar fine and promised to stay out of the trucking business.

As Attorney General, Spitzer continued to use the courts strategically. In suing General Electric for failing to clean up the Hudson River, he helped break a political and legal logjam that had kept the issue unresolved for years. "Even though we lost the case initially, it was incredibly effective at spurring the Environmental Protection Agency to action," Michele Hirshman, Spitzer's deputy, recalls. Spitzer applied the same type of thinking to the analyst investigation. Ultimately, he was less interested in indicting culpable individuals, such as Blodget, than in changing the way Wall Street operated. But for this strategy to be successful he needed to demonstrate that the conflicts of interest he had uncovered were pervasive. In February, 2002, he told Dinallo and Topman to broaden their focus from InfoSpace and GoTo.com to include all of Blodget's stock ratings. The investigators issued another subpoena to Merrill Lynch, demanding all of the Internet group's e-mails, on any subject, dating back to 1997.

In less than a month, thirty boxes of documents, containing tens of thousands of fresh e-mails, arrived at 120 Broadway. Dinallo added two more lawyers to the investigative team and started reading intensely himself, often staying at the office until after midnight. "No grass grows under Eliot's feet," he explained. "He wanted to either settle the case or file an action. We wanted to make sure we had looked at every single document. There was some tension there."



It didn't take long for the investigators to find more embarrassing material. On October 10, 2000, Eve Glatt, an assistant in the Merrill Lynch research department, sent Blodget a news story that said 24/7 Media, an online-advertising company, was having problems with its technology. "Don't know if you saw this," Glatt wrote, "nothing revolutionary—but it probably confirms what you and Virg"—Virginia Syer—"have talked about for some time." Blodget, who rated 24/7 Media's stock as 2-2, or accumulate-accumulate, e-mailed back, "That it's a pos, yes?" Glatt seemed confused by this acronym, so Blodget sent her a clarification: "pos = piece of shit." To which Glatt replied, "Exactly my point. Do you have a cheat sheet for your abbreviations? (I think I need one.)" Blodget then sent Glatt a message that read:

lol = laugh out loud
gt = great
pos = piece of shit
nfw =
pls = puleeeeez
imho = in my humble opinion

Glatt wrote back to express her gratitude: "I even understand nfw. Thanks."

Most of the exchanges weren't this entertaining, but some, such as one concerning LifeMinders, an online company that delivered life-style advice, were almost as damaging. "LFMN at $4," Blodget wrote to Glatt on December 4, 2000. "I can't believe what a POS that thing is. Shame on me/us for giving them any benefit of doubt." "Yeah, hard to believe," Glatt replied. "SO glad we don't have a 1-1, not that a 2-1 is all that much better."

It turned out that "pos" wasn't the only epithet that Blodget and his colleagues had applied to their stock picks. Among the other phrases they used were "dog," "piece of junk," and "powder keg." Every couple of days, Dinallo would take another bunch of e-mails upstairs to the twenty-fifth floor, where Spitzer and Dieter Snell, one of his closest advisers, would inspect them. Snell, a tall, fair forty-seven-year-old from New Jersey, led the team of federal prosecutors that convicted Ramzi Yousef of plotting to blow up airliners over the Pacific. He and Spitzer told Dinallo to press on. Although the new e-mails were revealing, they didn't necessarily demonstrate that

HOW BAD COULD IT BE?
R. Chast

Blodget and his colleagues had been in cahoots with Merrill Lynch's investment bankers—the central charge that needed proving. In order to buttress this argument, the investigators focussed on Blodget's dealings with Internet Capital Group, a financial firm that Merrill Lynch had taken public in August, 1999.

I.C.G., as it was commonly referred to, invested money in other Internet companies and helped them to prepare for I.P.O.s. Its stock hit $212 in December, 1999, but in the following ten months it fell to less than $15. Despite this precipitate slide, Blodget maintained the same rating: 2-1—accumulate-buy. On October 4, 2000, Blodget wrote to Sofia Ghachem, a colleague in the research department, and noted that they had failed to highlight how risky I.C.G. was. "Part of the reason we didn't highlight it is b/c we wanted to protect icg's banking business," Ghachem replied. "But anyway, none of this is relevant—the whole sector has corrected now." The following day, Blodget e-mailed another member of the research group, and said he thought I.C.G.'s stock was "going to 5," but still he didn't downgrade it.

A few days after his exchange with Ghachem, Jack M. Watkins, Jr., a Merrill Lynch broker in Winter Haven, Florida, e-mailed Blodget to say, "Henry, I feel like I need some help with what I should tell my clients regarding ICGE. I have never been hit like this and some of my clients are getting pretty upset." Blodget wrote back, "Jack, No hopeful news to relate, I'm afraid. This has been a disaster, and I'm sorry we all have been in front of it. There are no 'operations' here to fall back on, so there really is no 'floor' to the stock." Yet Blodget didn't downgrade I.C.G. for another month, and even then he dropped it just one notch, to 2-2.

Such modest moves did little to pacify brokers who were now being besieged by furious customers. On November 30, 2000, a broker from Grand Rapids, Michigan, complained to Andrew Melnick, the head of the research department, "I have had it with the analysts' postmortem downgrades or upgrades, this kind of hindsight my 13 year old daughter can do us for free. Why in the hell are we paying these guys multimillion salaries for this kind of work?" Melnick forwarded the e-mail to the research analysts, and Blodget copied it to three investment bankers, with an angry note that indicated he was tired of being criticized for pandering: "The more I read of these, the less willing I am to cut companies any slack, regardless of the predictable temper-tantrums, threats, and/or relationship damage that are likely to follow."

The internal row about I.C.G. followed an earlier argument, over Blodget's intention to downgrade another Internet company, called Aether Systems. In his note, Blodget asked the investment bankers to speak with Melnick, among others, about resolving such disputes. If he didn't get some new guidance on how to deal with "sensitive banking clients/situations," he added, his group was "going to just start calling the stocks (stocks, not companies), including AETH, like we see them, no matter what the ancillary business consequences are."

When Dinallo saw Blodget's declaration, he was elated. Unlike some of the previously discovered e-mails, this one wasn't jocular, and it hadn't been written in haste. It stated clearly, and in Blodget's own words, that he had been shaping his stock ratings to reflect Merrill Lynch's investment-banking interests. Dinallo thought it was the best piece of evidence he had seen in his career.

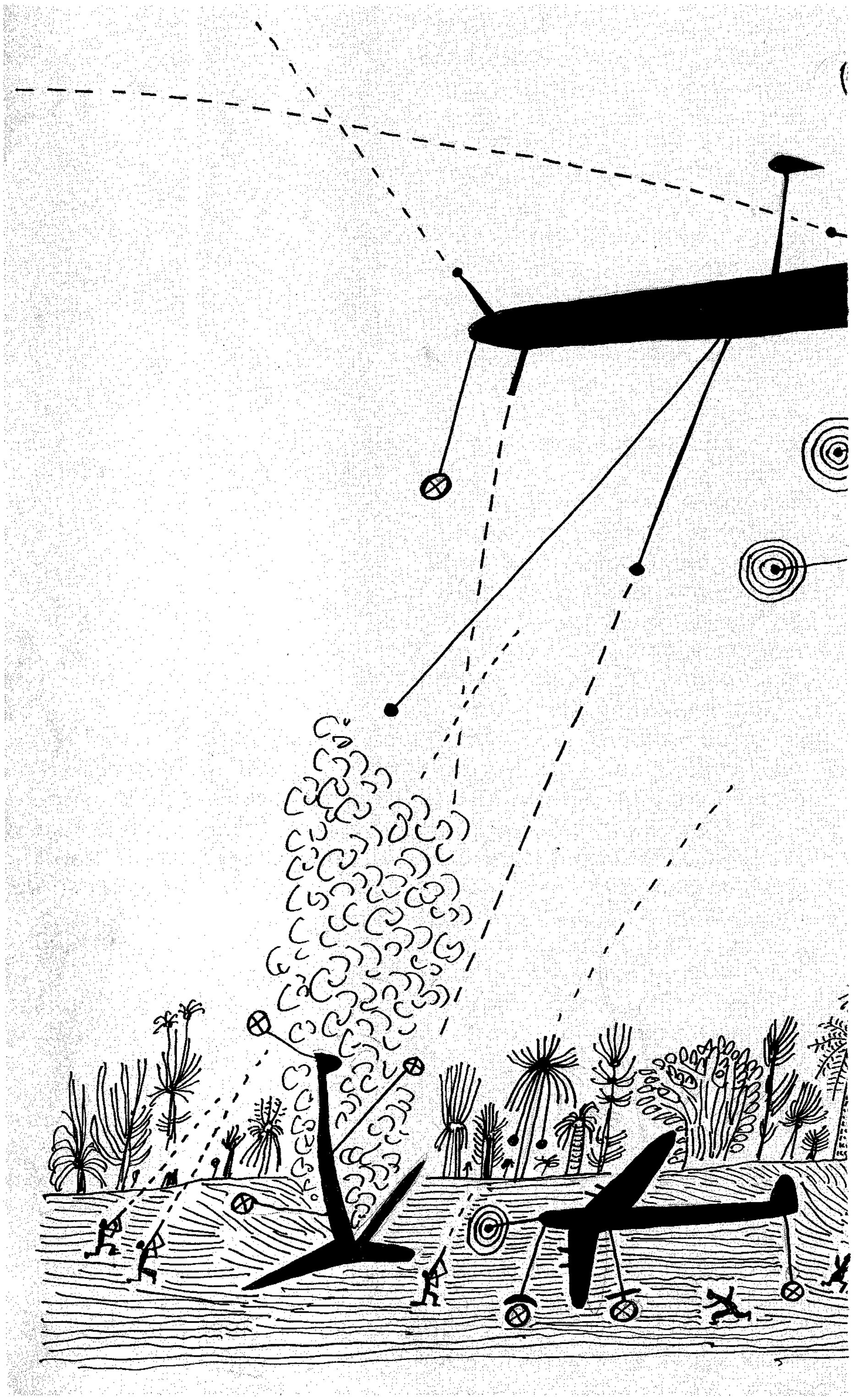
By late March, 2002, Spitzer and his senior colleagues were finally convinced that they had enough evidence to sue Merrill Lynch under the Martin Act. In the twelve months from December, 1999, to November, 2000, Blodget's team, according to its own calculations, had helped to produce a hundred and fifteen million dollars in investment-banking revenues for Merrill Lynch. Some of that money was returned to Blodget in the form of salary increases and bonuses. In 1999, his first year at Merrill, he earned about three million dollars. The following year, his compensation was raised to five million dollars. In 2001, despite the continued slump in the market, he earned twelve million dollars in salary and bonus, and he also reportedly received a severance payment of about two million dollars.

Spitzer informed Merrill Lynch that it was facing a serious legal problem, but the firm's attitude remained defiant. It had retained as outside counsel Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, one of the biggest law firms in the country, and Robert Morvillo, a leading criminal-defense attorney. During a presentation in Spitzer's office, the lawyers argued that Blodget's e-mails were being taken out of context, and that he had done no wrong. The denials were so dogmatic that Spitzer began to wonder whether Merrill Lynch's senior executives really knew what was in the Blodget e-mails. "The reason I wondered is that, frankly, it took a while for them to respond," Spitzer now says. "I would have expected them to have had a faster response, and they didn't."

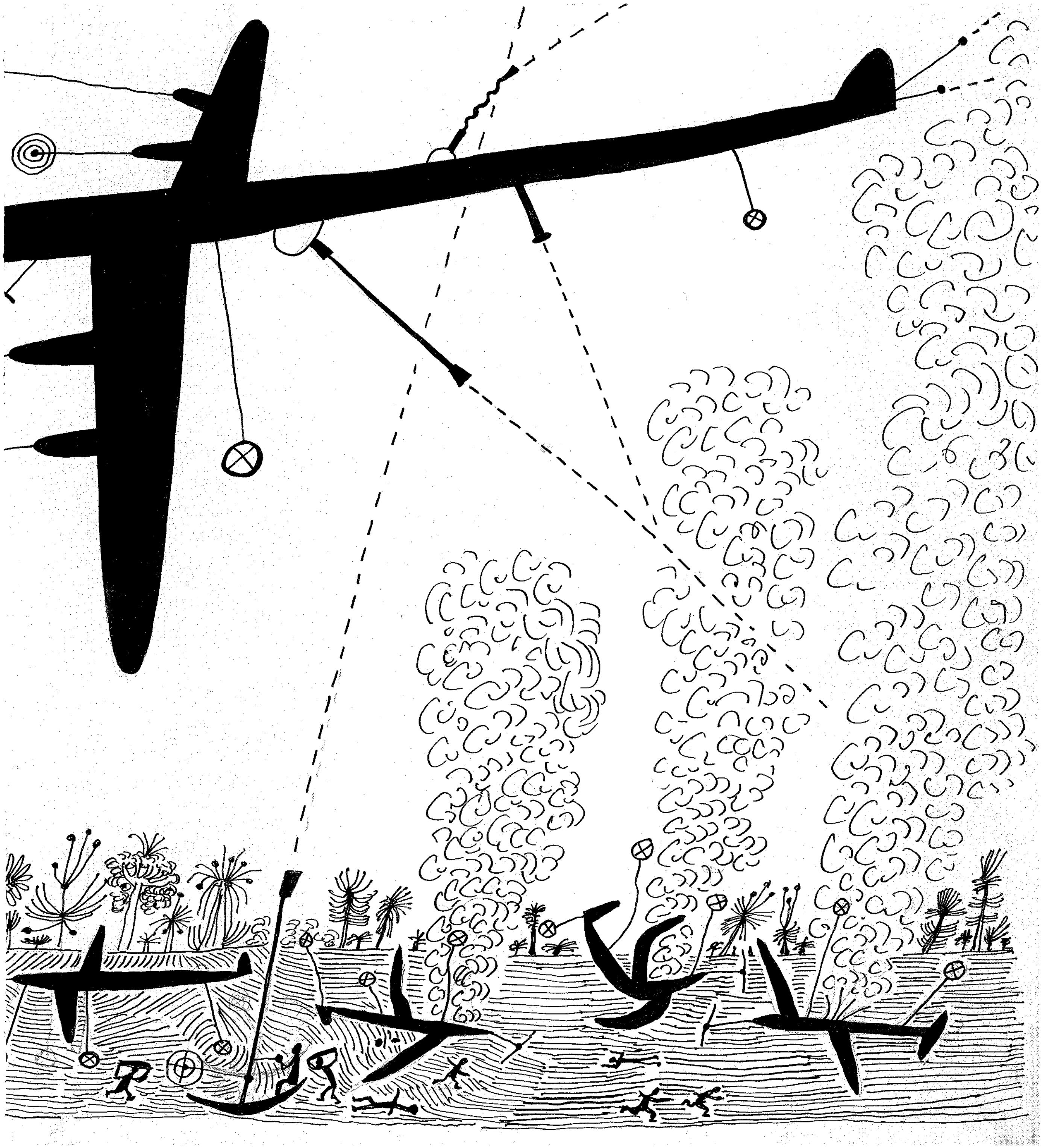
In the first week of April, Merrill Lynch finally asked Spitzer what it would take to stop the investigation and settle the case. He said that the firm would have to pay a fine and introduce reforms to insure the independence of its research analysts. Merrill Lynch signalled that it might be willing to accept these terms, but only on the condition that the Attorney General's office agree to seal the evidence it had collected. Spitzer refused to consider such a move. He believed it was essential to publish the evidence, so that individual investors could use it to seek restitution through the courts. He told Merrill Lynch that it had two choices: either the Blodget e-mails would become public as part of a settlement agreement that showed the firm in a reasonably positive light or they would become public as part of a lawsuit.

What type of lawsuit was yet to be determined. The most serious option was a criminal indictment, but Spitzer was reluctant to go that far. In the late nineteen-eighties, an ambitious young federal prosecutor named Rudolph Giuliani indicted Drexel Burnham Lambert on racketeering charges, and the firm went bankrupt when lenders refused to extend it more credit. More recently, Arthur Andersen went under after it was indicted on criminal charges relating to its accounting at Enron. Spitzer thought that the Justice Department's decision to bring criminal charges against Andersen had been a mistake. He didn't want to put Merrill Lynch out of business for actions he believed had been common on Wall Street. "The problems were structural," he says. "Everybody had permitted analysts to become appendages of the investment-banking system. It didn't seem reasonable to drop the criminal axe

SKETCHBOOK BY SAUL STEINBERG



"BOMBING, SOUTH PACIFIC," C. 1945. © THE SAUL STEINBERG FOUNDATION



on Merrill Lynch because of this. It did make sense to say to them, 'You've got to change the way you do business in a pretty fundamental way.' "

The alternative to a criminal indictment was some sort of civil suit. Gary Connor suggested filing an action under Section 354 of the Martin Act, which empowers the Attorney General to launch a public investigation of a company, with public hearings, and public disclosure of documents. Spitzer liked Connor's idea. He told Dinallo and Topman to prepare a lawsuit in case the settlement talks broke down.

On Friday, April 5, 2002, Dinallo spent most of the day at New York-Presbyterian Hospital, where his wife was having their second child. Every couple of hours, he called to check in with Bruce Topman, who was working on the lawsuit with Connor and Cheng. Upstairs on the twenty-fifth floor, a group of lawyers from Merrill Lynch was gathered around a conference table in Spitzer's office, a big, L-shaped room that is decorated in blue. On one wall there is a drawing of a young Spitzer making a presentation in court; on another, a photograph of an older Spitzer meeting Bill Clinton.

The meeting wasn't going well. Spitzer, who was accompanied by Snell and another of his senior aides, Beth Golden, wanted Merrill Lynch to acknowledge that it had misled investors and make a public apology, but the firm's lawyers kept repeating that Blodget's e-mails were being misinterpreted. Spitzer felt his temper rising. In what context, he wondered, was it justifiable for an analyst to describe one of his recommended stocks as a "piece of shit"? Spitzer suspected that some people on the Merrill Lynch side still doubted his willingness to go to court against such a big firm. After several hours of futile exchange, one of the lawyers said to him, "Merrill Lynch has a lot of powerful friends." Spitzer was furious at what he took as an implied threat. "Nobody is going to talk to me that way and expect to get a result," he snapped. "I've tried for weeks to negotiate with you guys in good faith. That's not going to be what I respond to."

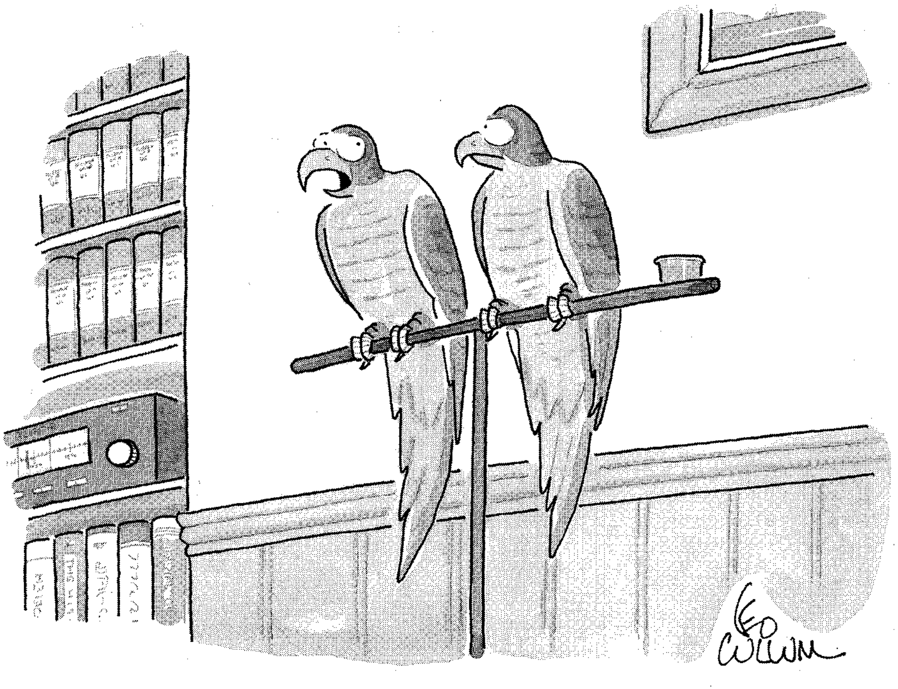
After the meeting broke up without agreement, Spitzer decided to act. On the morning of Monday, April 8th, Dinallo and Connor walked over to the State Supreme Court, at 60 Centre Street, to request a hearing under the Martin Act. The ex-parte judge, Justice Martin Schoenfeld, kept them waiting all morning in his clerk's office. When he was finally ready, Schoenfeld read through a thirty-eight-page complaint, which had been completed only the night before. It detailed some of Blodget's e-mails and alleged that Merrill Lynch's stock ratings "were tarnished by an undisclosed conflict of interest: the research analysts were acting as quasi-investment bankers for the companies at issue." Shortly after noon, the Judge signed the order that Dinallo had requested. He instructed Merrill Lynch to hand over more documents to the Attorney General and to state clearly in its stock circulars whether it had an investment-banking relationship with the company concerned.

Having obtained the order he wanted, Spitzer issued a press release in which he claimed that he had discovered "a shocking betrayal of trust by one of Wall Street's most trusted names," and said the revelation of wrongdoing at Merrill Lynch "must be a catalyst for reform throughout the entire industry." The message in these words and actions was clear: Spitzer had declared war on Wall Street.

The court order, and the media frenzy it engendered, came as a shock to Merrill Lynch. That very morning, Rudolph Giuliani, who had set up a consulting firm after leaving City Hall, had spoken to Spitzer on Merrill's behalf, reminding him that the company had stayed in New York after September 11th, and asking him to proceed with caution. Spitzer didn't tell Giuliani that Dinallo and Connor were already in court.

When Merrill Lynch's lawyers heard about the court order, their first reaction was to ask Spitzer whether Merrill's asset-management division, which runs dozens of mutual funds, would have to shut down. (Under the Investment Company Act of 1940, any financial firm that is subject to a court order can be barred from doing certain types of business.) Spitzer, who hadn't anticipated this development, called Stephen Cutler, the head of the S.E.C.'s enforcement division. It was the first time that Cutler had been informed of the lawsuit by Spitzer, and he told him that the court order would disrupt large parts of Merrill Lynch's business. Spitzer dispatched Dinallo back to Centre Street, where, in response to a request from Merrill Lynch's lawyers, Judge Schoenfeld agreed to stay his order while the two sides resumed settlement discussions.

Publicly, the firm continued to insist that the Blodget e-mails had been taken out of context. Whatever merits this argument had from a legal perspective,



"That's not my political opinion. That's just stuff I hear on the radio."

it proved economically unsustainable. Within a week, Merrill Lynch's stock-market valuation had fallen by more than five billion dollars. The firm's chief executive, David Komansky, and its president, E. Stanley O'Neal, decided that they had no alternative but to settle the case on Spitzer's terms. Komansky satisfied one of Spitzer's demands by publicly apologizing for the Blodget e-mails, saying that they "fall far short of our professional standards, and some are inconsistent with our policies."

Nonetheless, when talks resumed in Spitzer's office, Merrill Lynch representatives complained bitterly about being singled out from their peers, many of which employed analysts who had been just as involved in investment banking as Blodget. "Where is the horizontal equity in this?" they demanded. "Why us first?" Spitzer had some sympathy for this line of reasoning, he later conceded, but he didn't express it. Instead, he said, "Horizontal equity is a good thing. I believe in it. But I never found it terribly persuasive when I was prosecuting street crime and a guy said, 'Look, you missed the guy over there who did the same thing.' "

Spitzer did assure Merrill Lynch that he intended to deal with its rivals later. He wanted a settlement with Merrill Lynch that he could also impose on the rest of Wall Street. Initially, he asked for a complete separation of stock research and investment banking. Merrill Lynch didn't think this was practical, but it agreed to a series of reforms. From now on, its analysts would be paid only for providing services intended to benefit investors, and investment banking would play no role in their compensation. The firm would set up an internal committee to review its stock ratings for objectivity and integrity, and its compliance department would oversee any contacts between analysts and investment bankers.

The other big issue was the size of the fine that Merrill Lynch would have to pay. Having made almost six hundred and fifty million dollars in after-tax profits during the first quarter of 2002, the firm could hardly plead poverty. Spitzer settled on a figure of a hundred million dollars. "It was a real number," he said. "It got their attention. It didn't bankrupt them, but it forced them to wake up. But the money to me was never the most important part. The most important part was the set of reforms that they had to adopt."

On Monday, May 21, 2002, Spitzer announced that the two sides had reached an agreement. "By adopting the reforms embodied in the settlement, Merrill Lynch is setting a new standard for the rest of the industry to follow," he declared. Accompanying this statement was a clear threat to the rest of Wall Street. Spitzer's investigation had attracted the attention of prosecutors in other big states, such as California and New Jersey, who were now preparing to launch their own investigations of firms other than Merrill Lynch. Spitzer vowed to coöperate with these states, and with the national regulators, and to be "as aggressive as possible" in pushing for industry-wide reforms.

Spitzer's assault on Merrill Lynch shocked the industry's official regulators almost as much as it shocked Wall Street. Faced with an aggressive local prosecutor muscling his way into their terrain, the S.E.C., the New York Stock Exchange (N.Y.S.E.), and the National Association of Securities Dealers (N.A.S.D.) quickly launched a joint investigation into Wall Street research practices, along with the North American Securities Administrators Association (N.A.S.A.A.), which represents the fifty states.

Publicly, Spitzer welcomed this coöperative effort. Given his meagre investigative resources, he knew he couldn't investigate all of Wall Street. The regulators divvied up the top dozen firms. At the national level, the S.E.C., the N.Y.S.E., and the N.A.S.D. took several firms each to examine. At the local level, New York and California each took two firms, and eight other states—Alabama, Arizona, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Texas, Washington, and Utah—took one each. By the beginning of June, every big firm on Wall Street was being scrutinized by two sets of investigators. Goldman Sachs, for example, was dealing with the N.Y.S.E. and the Utah securities commissioner; Credit Suisse First Boston was answering to the N.A.S.D. and the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Privately, Spitzer referred to the enlarged investigation as "a multiheaded hydra monster" and worried about the potential chaos he had wrought. But he also believed that Wall Street had brought its fate upon itself by using its money and influence in Washington to block effective regulation and reform.

As the progenitor of the analyst investigation, New York could choose the firms it wanted to investigate. It selected Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, which employed Mary Meeker, and Salomon Smith Barney, which employed Jack Grubman, a leading analyst in the telecommunications sector. Dinallo kept intact the team that had humbled Merrill Lynch—Bruce Topman, Gary Connor, and Patricia Cheng—and gave it responsibility for scrutinizing Salomon Smith Barney. Dinallo's deputy, Roger Waldman, took charge of examining Morgan Stanley. Before the investigations were completed, the two firms would each produce more than two hundred thousand documents—twice as many as Merrill Lynch had handed over.

On the surface, at least, Mary Meeker and Jack Grubman had much in common. Meeker was one of the best-known figures in the online world, a friend of Amazon's Jeff Bezos, A.O.L.'s Steve Case, and eBay's Meg Whitman. Grubman, although less well known, was equally influential in the telecommunications industry, where he advised WorldCom, Global Crossing, Qwest, and many other upstart firms. In the past, both Meeker and Grubman had openly admitted that they helped to raise money for many of the companies they covered. "What used to be a conflict is now a synergy," Grubman famously told *Business Week* in 2000.

Despite the apparent similarities between Meeker and Grubman, the two investigations quickly headed in different directions. Meeker's e-mails generally avoided criticizing companies that she was recommending to investors, even when their financial results failed to match her previous predictions, which was often. "How is it possible that Mary Meeker's e-mails don't have the same crap in them as these other guys' e-mails?" one investigator said. "She was more experienced? She was more careful? She's a woman? What is it? I don't know. Maybe she was a true believer. Maybe she absolutely never had a doubt, even though she turned out to be wrong." To build a legal case, the investigators needed some evidence that Meeker had deliberately misled investors or omitted relevant information from her reports, but they couldn't find any. "You could call it a negligence case, by the way," the investigator said. "But it's not the same two-facedness you see elsewhere."

Topman's team, on the other hand, had another serious case on its hands. The N.A.S.D., which is basically a self-governing Wall Street club, had already deposed Grubman as part of an ongoing investigation into his relationship with Winstar Communications, a wireless Internet provider that went bankrupt in April, 2001. The N.A.S.D.'s investigators were experienced professionals, and the damaging evidence that they had collected was quickly made available to Spitzer's investigators.

Jack Grubman is an imposing forty-nine-year-old with receding black hair and thick eyebrows that hang heavily over his dark eyes. He was born in 1954 in Oxford Circle, a working-class neighborhood of Philadelphia. His father, Izzy, was a construction worker and an amateur boxer, who, according to some accounts, could tear a phone book in half. Grubman also boxed as a youngster, but it was his facile brain rather than his fists that distinguished him. After attending Northeast High School, where he was a member of the debate team, he majored in mathematics at Boston University. Afterward, he claimed to have graduated from M.I.T., but *Business Week* exposed that untruth when it profiled him in 2000. "At some point, I probably felt insecure, and it perpetuated itself," he said on admitting the deception.

After leaving B.U. in 1975, Grubman got a master's degree in math at Columbia. In 1977, he took a job as a quantitative researcher at A.T. & T., which was then the monopoly supplier of phone service to the entire country. Grubman spent eight years at A.T. & T., during which time the Justice Department split the company into eight local telephone operators, the Baby Bells, and a national long-distance service that retained the A.T. & T. name. Grubman balked at A.T. & T.'s entrenched bureaucracy, and in 1985 he shifted to Wall Street, becoming a telecommunications analyst at PaineWebber. He made his reputation by arguing that deregulation would allow smaller, nimbler companies to usurp the position of his former employer—an analysis that proved correct. In 1994, he moved to Salomon, where his disdain for A.T. & T. only increased.

Between 1996 and 2001, Salomon Smith Barney issued a hundred and ninety billion dollars' worth of stocks and bonds for eighty-one telecom firms, many of which were building their own networks. The stock-market boom facilitated this remarkable exercise in raising capital, but Grubman orchestrated it. Through close personal links to people like Bernie Ebbers, the chairman of WorldCom; Philip Anschutz, the founder of Qwest; and Gary Winnick, the founder of Global Crossing, he helped to generate more than a billion dollars in investment-banking fees for Salomon Smith Barney. In return, he earned an average of twenty million dollars a year, which made him the highest-paid stock analyst ever.

Grubman's problems began in April, 2000, when the Nasdaq crashed. Many of his favorite companies were losing money, and they needed to raise more just to stay in business, which was now increasingly difficult. Still, Grubman continued to defend their long-term prospects, arguing that the coming switch to "broadband" communications would greatly increase the demand for network capacity. In reality, demand was falling sharply as the economy slipped into a recession. In the first half of 2002, a number of firms linked to Grubman went bankrupt, including XO Communications, Global Crossing, and Metromedia Fiber Network.

When Spitzer's investigators started going through the documents from Salomon Smith Barney, they discovered that Grubman had been even more unpopular with his firm's retail brokers than Blodget had been at Merrill Lynch. Like Merrill, Salomon Smith Barney employed tens of thousands of people nationwide, many of them notable figures in their local communities. "Grubman is an absolute disgrace to our firm as an 'analyst,' " one broker wrote in 2000. "Maybe as a 'banker' he makes the firm a lot of money, but on the retail side the damage he has caused us is a disgrace! I hope many clients sue!" "Grubman is an investment bank whore!" another broker wrote in the same year. "When is the firm going to stop pimping him?" By 2001, the brokers were even angrier. "In my 16 years in the retail brokerage business, NEVER have I received such misguided, horrific recommendations from an analyst," one of them commented. "Some of his calls may, perhaps, put us in positions where we have to defend ourselves legally. Why does management and our research department continually defend his advice."

Salomon Smith Barney supposedly maintained extensive Chinese walls to protect the integrity of its analysts, but other documents handed over to Spitzer indicated that many of the firm's senior executives knew the brokers' skepticism was justified. Early in 2001, John Hoffmann, the head of global equity research management, gave an internal presentation in which he pointed out that of the almost twelve hundred stock ratings that Salomon Smith Barney had outstanding on January 29, 2001, just one was an "underperform," and none at all were "sell." (Like Merrill Lynch, Salomon Smith Barney used a five-point grading system, but its wording was slightly different: 1 meant buy; 2—outperform; 3—neutral; 4—underperform; 5—sell.) Jay Mandelbaum, the head of Salomon Smith Barney's brokerage arm, was so disgusted by the firm's analysts that he threatened to cut off his division's contribution to the research budget.

The Grubman investigation was quickly overtaken by outside events. In late June, 2002, WorldCom, the nation's second-largest long-distance company, said it had uncovered a multibillion-dollar accounting fraud, and Grubman was called to testify on Capitol Hill. He insisted that he had believed in the companies he covered, and said he was sorry that investors were suffering losses. His apology received less coverage than the revelation of his salary and an admission that he had been so close to WorldCom that he had attended several of the firm's board meetings. In late July, WorldCom filed for bankruptcy, and Grub-

ZOMBIES

1980, I was returned to the city exposed
in black and white as the lights went on and on.
A back-alley neon sign, the first I'd seen,
drew us sweetly down and in to brightness:
a doll's parasol, a spike of green cherries,
the physic of apricot brandy, actual limes
and morning-to-night shades of rum.
Newly old enough and government-moneyed,
we knocked them back, melting the ice
between us and the unaccustomed looseness
of being legitimate and free. What possessed us?
Was it the kick of spirits or the invisible syrup
in which they swam that worked in our veins,
charming us into a car and forty miles east

to the fields of our years of boredom . . .
Did we not remember the curse of this place?
How Sundays drank our blood as we watched
dry paint or the dust on the television screen.
How people died bursting out of a quiet life,
or from being written into a small world's stories.
Who can see such things and live to tell?
How we hunted all night for noise and love,
striking out once across ploughed and frozen earth,
lurching from rut to rut until at the edge
we smashed our way out through a hedge, to fall
eight feet to the road. Of course, we felt nothing.
Was it not ourselves who frightened us most?
As if brightness or sweetness could save us.

—*Lavinia Greenlaw*

man's reputation was further tarnished.

Spitzer was monitoring these developments closely. Every morning when Dinallo got to work, there was a message from his boss asking for an update on the investigation. To make a case against Salomon Smith Barney, the Attorney General's office needed to show that Grubman, despite his public protestations, hadn't really believed in his upbeat reports. At least some of his e-mails suggested that this had been the case, Dinallo informed Spitzer.

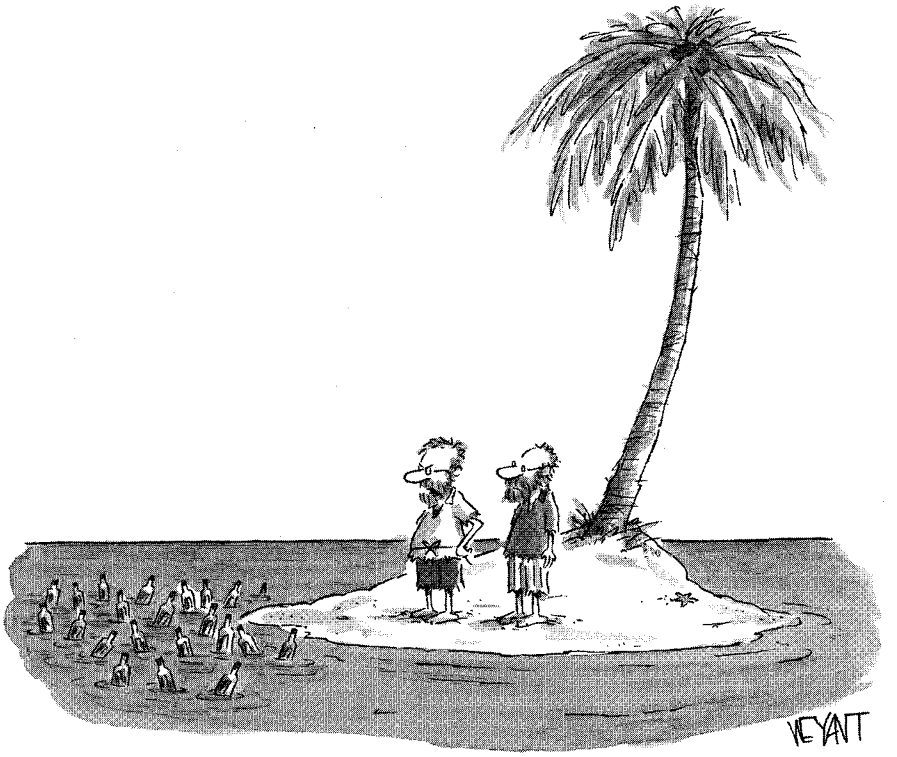
In April, 2001, when Winstar had filed for bankruptcy protection, Frank Yeary, a Salomon Smith Barney investment banker, recommended to Grubman that he reassess the risks facing other telecommunications companies. "Agreed," Grubman replied. "Also to be blunt we in research have to downgrade stocks lest our retail force . . . end up having buy-rated stocks that go under." But these words did not lead to action. For several months, Grubman failed to downgrade any of the companies that he covered. He explained why in a subsequent e-mail to another colleague: "Most of our banking clients are going to zero and you know I wanted to downgrade them months ago but got huge pushback from banking."

In August, 2002, while the investigators were searching for more evidence, Grubman quit his job, claiming that the controversy surrounding him had made it impossible for him to continue. Under the terms of a severance agreement, Salomon Smith Barney paid him more than thirty million dollars and agreed to continue paying his legal bills. These were about to increase substantially, as Spitzer's investigators turned their attention to one of Grubman's most notorious stock recommendations.

In November, 1999, Grubman had shocked the rest of Wall Street by upgrading A.T. & T., a company he had criticized for years, from neutral to buy. He tried to justify his volte-face by saying that the phone giant's purchase of a big cable company, Telecommunications Inc., had transformed its prospects, but this explanation was greeted with skepticism. At the time of the upgrade, A.T. & T. was preparing to spin off its cellular division in a stock offering that was expected to be one of the biggest yet. The investment banks that were hired to manage the issue stood to make tens of millions of dollars each in fees. As long as Grubman remained critical of A.T. & T., Salomon Smith Barney was unlikely to be one of them. Shortly after the upgrade, A.T. & T. selected Salomon Smith Barney to co-manage the stock issue, along with Goldman Sachs and Merrill Lynch. The offering took place in April, 2000, and Salomon Smith Barney pocketed more than forty million dollars. Six months later, Grubman downgraded A.T. & T., changing his rating back to "neutral."

Timing wasn't the only interesting angle of the A.T. & T. story: Sanford Weill, the chairman of Citigroup, Salomon Smith Barney's parent company, was a member of A.T. & T.'s board; and Michael Armstrong, A.T. & T.'s chairman, was a member of Citigroup's board. At the time of the upgrade, some people on Wall Street had speculated that Weill might have played some role in it. This had never been confirmed, but Dinallo and Spitzer thought it was worth pursuing. On July 19, 2002, the Attorney General's office sent a subpoena to A.T. & T. demanding any documents it had relating to its decision to hire Salomon Smith Barney to co-manage the wireless stock offer.

In investigating Weill, Spitzer was targeting the most successful financier of his generation, a man who was the chairman of Carnegie Hall and had an entire medical college named after him and his wife, at Cornell University. Weill was born into an immigrant family in Bensonhurst seventy years ago. During a long career, he had created two big firms: Shearson Loeb Rhoades, which he sold to American Express in 1981; and Travelers Group, which he merged with Citicorp in 1998. He was known as an intimidating boss, whose tirades sometimes reduced his underlings to tears, but, unlike some of his



"Junk mail."

colleagues, he had been quick to realize the threat that Spitzer's investigation represented. The day after Merrill Lynch reached a settlement with the Attorney General, Weill sent Spitzer a letter saying that Salomon Smith Barney would adopt the same rules Merrill had agreed to, and would do more if its rivals agreed to do the same. Over the summer, Citigroup introduced further reforms, but the revelations about Grubman and WorldCom continued to hit its stock price.

The week after Labor Day, Weill tried to regain the initiative. He shunted aside Michael Carpenter, Salomon Smith Barney's chief executive, and replaced him with one of his closest aides, Charles Prince, Citigroup's general counsel. A few days after being appointed, Prince went to see Spitzer and said he wanted to reach a settlement with the government as soon as possible. "My mandate is to try and get this cleaned up and done," he said.

News of the A.T. & T. investigation confirmed the opinion of many on Wall Street and in Washington that Spitzer was a deranged publicity hog willing to go to any lengths to further his own political ambitions. This was an overstatement, but Spitzer had by now developed a comprehensive critique of the financial industry, which some people in his office jokingly referred to as "Spitzer's Grand Unified Field Theory." In speeches and in interviews, he declared that the entire stock-market boom had degenerated into a conspiracy to enrich the insiders—analysts, investment bankers, and senior corporate executives—at the expense of ordinary investors.

This version of events was exaggerated, but it did contain some truth. During the boom years, Wall Street banks had often granted the executives of companies they did business with generous allocations of stock in "hot" I.P.O.s, which could be sold to other investors at a premium—a practice known as "spinning." Between June, 1996, and August, 2000, for example, Salomon Smith Barney gave WorldCom's Bernie Ebbers stock in twenty-one I.P.O.s, which netted him profits of more than eleven and half million dollars. Qwest's Philip Anschutz received stock in fifty-seven I.P.O.s and pocketed almost five million dollars.

To Spitzer, "spinning" represented nothing less than commercial bribery. On September 30, 2002, his office sued Ebbers, Anschutz, and three other executives who had been close to Grubman: Stephen Garofalo, the chairman of Metromedia Fiber Network; Clark McLeod, the founder of McLeodUSA; and Joseph Nacchio, the former chief executive of Qwest. The complaint accused the defendants of "fraudulent practices"—namely, the failure to disclose their I.P.O. allocations—and demanded that they give back more than twenty-eight million dollars in profits.

Ebbers's lawyer dismissed the suit as a publicity stunt, but the prospect of Spitzer taking people to court for what was a common practice unnerved many businesspeople. "If you can turn this"—spinning—"into a case of commercial bribery, then you can make anything into commercial bribery," one senior Wall Street figure fumed. Some of Spitzer's fellow-regulators also reacted angrily to the C.E.O. lawsuit, because, once again, Spitzer hadn't informed them in advance of going to court. "Before we file a civil suit, we would talk about it at great lengths with other agencies to make sure it wouldn't impede a criminal investigation," one S.E.C. official explained. "Eliot didn't tell any other agency what he was doing."

Although the national and local regulators were supposed to be coöperating, relations between Spitzer and Harvey Pitt, the chairman of the S.E.C., had been deteriorating since earlier in the summer, when Spitzer had publicly accused the S.E.C. market regulators of being "asleep at the switch" during the recent wave of corporate accounting scandals. The difference between Spitzer and Pitt was primarily one of philosophy. As a lawyer who had worked for the financial industry for thirty years, representing everybody from Ivan Boesky to Merrill Lynch, Pitt believed that the only effective form of regulation was self-regulation. Since arriving at the S.E.C., the previous summer, he had been pushing the N.Y.S.E. and the N.A.S.D. to strengthen their rule books to prevent the sort of abuses that Spitzer was investigating. At the start of May, 2002, the S.E.C. approved a new set of guidelines for analysts proposed by the N.Y.S.E. and the N.A.S.D., which contained many of the sanctions that Spitzer had been calling for. "Harvey Pitt didn't give speeches," Lori Richards, the head of the S.E.C.'s compliance-inspections department, said recently. "He did something better. He changed the rules." (Pitt resigned as chairman last November.) To Richards, and to others at the S.E.C., Spitzer's role has been exaggerated. "From my point of view, he did not discover the conflicts of interest on Wall Street," Richards said. "He discovered the results—the e-mails. The e-mails were colorful, and they attracted public attention."

By coincidence, the day after Spitzer filed the C.E.O. lawsuit he was due to have dinner with Pitt, Dick Grasso, the chairman of the N.Y.S.E., and Robert Glauber, the chairman of the N.A.S.D. Grasso, a bullet-headed fifty-six-year-old, had arranged the dinner in the hope of reaching a resolution to the analyst investigation. In September alone, the Dow had fallen by more than ten per cent. Grasso didn't believe that Spitzer's activities were solely responsible for the market's troubles—uncertainty about terrorism and a possible war against Iraq were also important factors—but he couldn't see how it could recover without an end to the investigation.

The dinner took place at Tiro a Segno, an Italian club on MacDougal Street. After some initial pleasantries, Pitt said that he wanted the S.E.C. to work with the other agencies to arrive at a far-reaching agreement with Wall Street. Spitzer echoed Pitt's sentiments. Despite his public clashes with the S.E.C. chairman, he knew that the only way to get comprehensive reform was for all the regulators to join together. As a state prosecutor, he had neither the authority nor the expertise to impose changes on the entire financial industry.

A couple of weeks later, on Columbus Day, the regulators met again, this time in Washington, at the Georgetown Club, where they reached an outline agreement on the sort of settlement they wanted to arrive at. As the dinner was breaking up, the S.E.C.'s Stephen Cutler drew Spitzer and Dinallo aside to tell them some news. Over the weekend, one of Salomon Smith Barney's lawyers had called him to say that the firm had discovered a new batch of Grubman e-mails, some of which were potentially damaging.

The call to Cutler marked the culmination of a long-running dispute about the pace at which Salomon Smith Barney was producing e-mails. Back in April, 2002, when investigators from the N.A.S.D. had been deposing Grubman as part of the Winstar investigation, Barry Goldsmith, the head of enforcement at the N.A.S.D., had noticed that Grubman was a heavy e-mail user, often writing from his BlackBerry handheld computer. Goldsmith asked Salomon Smith Barney to recheck its electronic files for Grubman's messages, and, sure enough, a lot of them had been missed. More e-mails were turned over during the summer, but not enough to satisfy the investigators. In August, Cutler told the firm that if it wanted to reach a settlement it would first have to deliver more documents, so that the investigations could be completed.

On the morning of October 15, 2002, the new e-mails started arriving at 120 Broadway. Included among them was a long series of messages that Grubman had sent from his BlackBerry to Carol Cutler, an analyst for the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation, a money-management firm that had invested heavily in telecommunications stocks recommended by Salomon Smith Barney. (Carol Cutler is no relation to Stephen Cutler.) Grubman, who is married with twins, and Cutler, who is single, appeared to be on intimate terms. Their e-mails covered a period of several months, but the investigators focussed on an exchange that took place over a single weekend: Saturday, January 13, and Sunday, January 14, 2001.

At 11:18 A.M. on Saturday, Cutler asked Grubman whether he had read about her fellow-Midwesterner Ronald Reagan missing his own ninetieth-birthday party because of illness. "Ronald Reagan is one of my clan, and I feel him leaving," Cutler wrote. "I so wish I could of had the opportunity to meet him." During the rest of the day, the two chattered back and forth, interspersing gossip about work with explicit sexual banter and queries about each other's personal history. "I don't like to focus on the past, but if it is a tale to be told then I'll tell it," Grubman wrote at 3:15 P.M. "I'm actually proud of my path—and it was much more difficult than what most people have to contend with and I've turned out pretty cool."

"I'd say so," Cutler replied.

At 5:18 P.M., Grubman brought up his A.T. & T. upgrade of November, 1999, boasting, "Everyone thinks I upgraded T"—A.T. & T.—"to get lead for AWE"—A.T. & T. Wireless. "Nope. I used Sandy to get my kids in 92nd St. Y pre-school (which is harder than Harvard) and Sandy needed Armstrong's vote on our board to nuke Reed in showdown. Once coast was clear for both of us (i.e.

"You can perform a satanic ritual in the poultry department when you're older."

Sandy clear victor and my kids confirmed) I went back to my normal negative on T. Armstrong never knew that we both (Sandy and I) played him like a fiddle.”

To anybody familiar with the upper echelons of New York society and the internal politics of Citigroup, Grubman's casually written e-mail was potentially explosive. The 92nd Street Y preschool is a highly selective nursery school on the Upper East Side which caters to about a hundred and seventy-five toddlers, whose parents pay between twelve and fifteen thousand dollars a year for a curriculum that emphasizes Jewish rituals and culture. “Reed” referred to John Reed, Citigroup's former co-chairman, who resigned in February, 2000, after the board voted to make Weill the sole leader of the firm. When the e-mail was sent, Michael Armstrong was the chairman of A.T. & T. and a director of Citigroup. The e-mail clearly alleged that Weill had asked Grubman to upgrade A.T. & T. in order to gain Armstrong's support in a boardroom battle with Reed, and that, in return, Weill had helped to get Grubman's children into an exclusive preschool.

If Cutler realized the import of this allegation, she didn't let it show. “Good for you!” she wrote back to Grubman at 5:51 P.M. “Very good school so good for kids. I never knew real reason for sure. But I felt like there was pressure.” Then, at the end of her e-mail, Cutler returned to personal issues: “What's your daughter's name?” It took Grubman a while to reply to this message, and when he did he also mixed business with family matters. “I knew it would cause grief,” he wrote at 7:11 P.M. “The biggest thing that pissed me off is that T did exactly as I knew they would for precisely the reasons I thought. Her name is Elizabeth (btw: aren't you interested in my son's name?).”

“If containment doesn't work, we can always eat them.”

“David Benjamin,” Cutler replied at 7:33 P.M. “David was your mother's name—Mildred Davis. She died in 1992. Benjamin is your middle name. All correct? Does she have a middle name and do you call her by her full name Elizabeth.” A few minutes later, Cutler sent Grubman another note: “Btw, what did you mean that T did exactly as you knew they would for precisely the reasons you thought?” Grubman answered Cutler's questions sequentially. “OK smartie, Mils is Lizzie's middle name,” he wrote at 7:44 P.M. At 7:50 P.M., he added, “That the stock would collapse because the core business would fall apart.”

On Sunday, the exchange of e-mails continued, with Cutler wondering why Grubman hadn't told her the reasons for the A.T. & T. upgrade before and assuring him that he could trust her. “I will never judge you Jack,” she wrote. “And if there is any shadow of a doubt about that, let it go.” “No, we just never discussed,” Grubman replied. “I always viewed T as a business deal between me and Sandy.”

Spitzer ordered his investigators to determine the veracity of Grubman's claims as quickly as possible, and during the ensuing few weeks he pestered Dinallo constantly. “Eric and everyone downstairs were living it eighteen hours a day and doing most of the work,” he recalls. “I was living it five hours a day, because I also had the rest of the office to think about.”

The first issue that needed resolving was why Salomon Smith Barney had taken so long to turn over the new e-mails. Concealing evidence is a criminal offense. Robert McCaw and Lewis Liman, two senior partners at Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering, were acting as the bank's outside counsel. They insisted that a technological problem had caused the delay. Some of Spitzer's investigators reacted skeptically to this story, but their boss eventually accepted it.

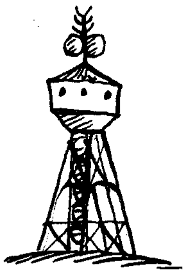
After reading Grubman's e-mails, Bruce Topman discovered a two-page memo that the analyst had sent to Weill on November 5, 1999, a couple of weeks before he issued his upgrade. Entitled “Re: AT&T and the 92nd Street Y,” it began with Grubman informing Weill that he had had a “good meeting” with Michael Armstrong the previous day and that he was planning to meet other A.T. & T. executives the following week. "On another matter," Grubman continued, "as I alluded to you the other day, we are going through the ridiculous but necessary process of pre-school applications in Manhattan. For someone who grew up in a household with a father making $8,000 a year and for someone who attended public schools, I do find this process a bit strange, but there are no bounds for what you do for your children." After noting that he had attached a list of the 92nd Street Y's directors to his note, Grubman went on, "If you feel comfortable and know some of those board members well enough, I would greatly appreciate it if you could ask them to use any influence they feel comfortable in using to help us as well."

Officials at the 92nd Street Y confirmed to the investigators that Grubman's son and daughter started attending the nursery school in September, 2000. One of the Y's directors, Joan Tisch, said that Weill, who was a longtime friend, had approached her about Grubman's children and had indicated that Citigroup would be willing to make a donation to the Y, which turned out to be a million dollars, payable in five annual installments. Armed with this evidence, Spitzer's team confronted the two principals.

On Wednesday, October 30, 2002, Dinallo, Snell, Topman, and Golden deposed Grubman in a conference room on the twenty-third floor of 120 Broadway. He confirmed that Weill had asked him to reëxamine A.T. & T. and that he had requested Weill's help in getting his children into preschool, but he denied that the two things were connected. When asked about his claim that Weill had wanted the A.T. & T. upgrade in order to help him "nuke" Reed, he said he had made it up to impress Carol Cutler.

Two weeks later, Hirshman, Snell, and Topman interviewed Weill at his lawyer's midtown office. He claimed that he had asked Grubman to take another look at A.T. & T. because he believed, as a director of the company and a longtime admirer of its chairman, Armstrong, that it was transforming itself for the better. He insisted that he hadn't told Grubman what to write and that he had expected the analyst to reach his own conclusions. The interview lasted all day, with a short break for lunch. Weill also confirmed that he had helped to get Grubman's children into the preschool, but he said it was simply a favor for a valued employee.

On November 13, 2002, the same day that Weill was interviewed by Spitzer's team, Charles Gasparino, a reporter at the *Wall Street Journal* who had been covering the investigation since the beginning, revealed the existence of Grubman's messages to Carol Cutler and quoted from part of the A.T. & T. e-mail, citing as his source "a person who has reviewed it." The following day, the 92nd Street Y saga was everywhere, including the front page of the *Times*, where it ran under the headline "WALL ST. AND THE NURSERY SCHOOL: A NEW YORK STORY." Weill issued a public statement denying that he had told Grubman what to write. He and his colleagues were furious that any part of Grubman's e-mails had been leaked, especially since he had already repudiated some of them.



Many people on Wall Street assumed that Spitzer's office had leaked the material in order to exert more leverage on Salomon Smith Barney and Citigroup. "It was really very calculated," a senior executive at another firm said. "It put a lot of pressure on Citi. They held Sandy to ransom." But Spitzer, for his part, emphatically denies that he or any of his staff was the source of the story. "None of that came from us—not a single piece of it," he insists. "Charlie Gasparino is a good reporter, aggressive, has good sources. He started calling us a couple of days before the article came out and said, 'I've got this stuff.' We called over to Citigroup and said to them, 'Look, somebody is leaking all or part of this. It's going to be a problem.' "

Even if Spitzer didn't leak Grubman's e-mails to Carol Cutler, he certainly used the media on other occasions, especially during the settlement negotiations with the Wall Street firms, which began in late October. In one meeting at the New York Stock Exchange, Ted Levine, general counsel for U.B.S. PaineWebber, confronted Spitzer. "You really can't do this," Levine said. "We can't have everything we say reported in the media." Spitzer angrily denied he was the source of the stories, and accused the firms of leaking—a charge that didn't impress many of the Wall Street executives present. "That very day, there was an article in the *Journal* about conversations between Eliot Spitzer and Stephen Cutler, which people on the Street weren't party to," one of them said. "There is no way it could have been leaked by the Street."

One Wall Street executive says he has never seen anything like the media manipulation that took place during the analyst probe. "Nothing compares to this," he said. "Leaking documents, leaking testimony, leaking the intentions of the regulators. Everything was leaking." Spitzer's courting of reporters also irked some of his fellow-regulators, particularly those at the S.E.C. and the N.A.S.D., which have a reputation for carrying out investigations discreetly. Spitzer, on the other hand, saw media management as a legitimate and effective tool to build momentum for reform. Unlike the national regulators, who have to deal with Wall Street on an ongoing basis, he saw himself as an independent outsider, whose role was to uncover abuses and remedy them in any way he could. If that involved making some powerful people uncomfortable, he was willing to do that.

By the end of November, the regulators and the Wall Street firms had agreed on the broad outlines of a settlement, but there were many detailed issues left to resolve concerning the roles that analysts could play. Cutler, who had taken the lead in the discussions with the banks, drew up a lengthy "touchpoints" document, which barred analysts from taking part in I.P.O. pitches and investor road shows but allowed them to vet potential stock offerings and to talk to investment bankers under the supervision of their firm's compliance department.

Spitzer, who had originally called for a complete separation of analysts and investment bankers, showed himself more willing to compromise than many people on Wall Street had anticipated. He also backed off a suggestion that the investment banks be forced to finance a new independent-research consortium; and he agreed to an alternative proposal, under which Wall Street would provide investors with independent research from existing sources, such as Value Line and Standard & Poor's. The one thing Spitzer insisted on was a ban on spinning. Even when some of his fellow-regulators argued that such a move would amount to criminalizing C.E.O.s, Spitzer refused to drop this demand.

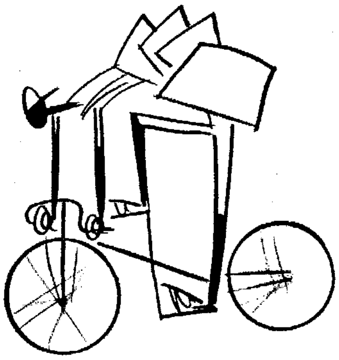
As the investigations across the country intensified, some people on Wall Street started to see that dealing with Spitzer was preferable to dealing with other state regulators. Demetrios Boutris, the corporations commissioner of California, was calling for a minimum fine of a hundred million dollars for each investment bank, regardless of what it had done. William Galvin, the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, had released damaging internal e-mails from Credit Suisse First Boston and recommended a criminal prosecution of the firm. "What brought people to the table was the fear that this could go out of control," said a Wall Street executive who was involved in the settlement negotiations. "There was no way of controlling what the states might do. It was a populist issue. Don't forget, the investment-banking industry was being assaulted by the Attorney General of the state where it is based. If you couldn't get a sympathetic hearing with Spitzer, what the hell were you going to get in Idaho?"

Meanwhile, Spitzer's patience had almost run out with the endless rounds of negotiations. "It's a mess," he confided just before Thanksgiving. "We had a meeting the other day, just the government side, and there must have been forty-five or fifty people in the room. I am firmly of the view that if you put more than three people in a room nothing happens." Spitzer was also aware that allowing the investigation to drag on for too long would be politically dangerous. On November 21st, the *Daily News*, an important publication for a New York Democrat, ran an editorial calling for Spitzer's activities to be curbed. Earlier in the month, the *News* had endorsed Spitzer in a successful reëlection bid, but now it spotted "disturbing signs that in his zeal to reform Wall Street, Spitzer has crossed the line between responsible leadership and—dare we say it?—abuse of prosecutorial power."

Spitzer was keen to allay such concerns, but before he could call a truce he had to decide what to do about Grubman and Weill. The case against Grubman was straightforward: his own e-mails demonstrated that he had upgraded A.T. & T. for ulterior motives. The evidence against Weill was more circumstantial. After more than a month of digging, the investigators still hadn't turned up anything to suggest that he hadn't believed in A.T. & T.'s prospects when he asked Grubman to reconsider his opinion. Some people in Spitzer's office believed the allegation in Grubman's e-mail that Weill wanted A.T. & T.'s stock upgraded to win Armstrong's support, but they could hardly force Grubman to retract his sworn testimony disowning it.

In the first week of December, Spitzer and his senior colleagues reached a tentative decision not to take any legal action against Weill. (The N.A.S.D., which carried out its own investigation, reached the same conclusion a couple of weeks later.) "The issue was very simple," Spitzer explained. "Was there a knowing effort to pressure an analyst to issue a false report? As a prosecutor, if you can prove that case you bring that case. If you can't prove that case you don't bring it. There was a back-and-forth between Sandy Weill and Jack Grubman, but nowhere will you find evidence that Sandy Weill didn't believe this was a good stock that should be bought. He was on the board. He believed in it. If he believed in it, then one might not like the fact that an analyst felt pressure from him, but there was no violation. We are bound by the evidence."

Spitzer was determined to get an agreement between Wall Street and the regulators by Christmas, even if it was only an agreement in principle. On Tuesday, December 17th, he decided that the settlement talks had gone on long enough. While attending an event at the Kennedy Library, in Cambridge, he called his deputy, Michele Hirshman, and said, "I think we need to have a meeting tomorrow where we call people in and tell them this is it." The following morning, Spitzer called Dick Grasso and Stephen Cutler to tell them that he planned to issue an ultimatum. Cutler thought Spitzer's gambit was unnecessary, but Spitzer wasn't to be dissuaded. At lunchtime, representatives from five banks gathered in his office to hear him declare, "Either we close this today and get an agreement or the negotiating effort is over and we'll go back to doing what we do best, which is making cases."



Within forty-eight hours, ten of Wall Street's biggest banks had agreed to the regulators' terms, which included a series of reforms designed to insure the independence of research analysts, a ban on issuing I.P.O. stocks to corporate executives, and fines totalling $1.4 billion. Spitzer had thought only five firms would agree to settle: Credit Suisse First Boston, Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley, and Salomon Smith Barney. But five more signed on: Bear Stearns, Deutsche Bank, J. P. Morgan Chase, Lehman Brothers, and U.B.S. In the end, there were no major holdouts. As confirmation faxes from the banks arrived at the Attorney General's office, one of Spitzer's deputies marvelled at his negotiating strategy. "He's pulled a Spitzer," he said to himself. "He's rammed through an agreement when everybody else was sitting around worrying about details that were not really important."

On Friday, December 20th, Dick Grasso stepped up to a podium in the gilded boardroom of the N.Y.S.E. and hailed what he called a "historic occasion"—the unveiling of a settlement that would "restore public confidence in the finest system of enterprise that the world has ever known." Stephen Cutler then outlined the agreement in more modest language, saying it contained "significant reforms that will serve investors for years to come."

Spitzer was dressed in his usual outfit: a dark suit, a starched shirt, and a striped tie—the very picture of Brooks Brothers anti-chic. He thanked each member of his investigative team, down to Clayton Donnelley, who had numbered and indexed all the e-mails, and hailed their

VINTAGE REMEDIES
CHÂTEAUNEUF DU NYQUIL
1974
NUITS ST. SINUTAB
1976
DOMAINE DE DRISTAN
1982
Crawford

work in uncovering conflicts of interest on Wall Street. Eric Dinallo, who was standing next to Spitzer, felt regret that the biggest case of his career was coming to an end. Bruce Topman, who was sitting nearby, had no mixed feelings. Giving up private practice and working for the government had been the right decision, he thought.

After the speeches, reporters asked questions, surprising Spitzer and his colleagues with their skeptical tone. Why was this an agreement in principle rather than a final agreement? And why didn't it contain any admission of wrongdoing on the part of the Wall Street firms? "How can you restore public confidence without any admission of wrongdoing or individual indictments?" a reporter from the Los Angeles *Times* inquired.

Three and a half months later, there is still no final settlement, although one is supposed to be finalized in April. Moreover, there haven't been any criminal indictments brought against individual transgressors—an omission that led one media pundit to accuse Spitzer of "premature capitulation." Grubman has agreed to be banned from the securities industry and to pay a fine of fifteen million dollars—less than half the severance payment he received. Blodget may have to pay a similar fine, but the only Wall Street executive facing the possibility of jail time is Frank Quattrone, an investment banker at Credit Suisse First Boston, who is accused of encouraging his colleagues to destroy evidence.

Sitting in his office recently, Spitzer appealed to history in defense of his actions. "Every now and again, I sit here and say, 'Where were we a year ago?' " he said. "We were in a world where nobody accepted the fundamental premise of our argument—that Wall Street's business model was rotten. We needed to persuade the policymakers and the investment banks that the fundamental notion we were articulating was right. We've done that. At the margins, there will always be these disagreements on whether we have done enough on the individuals. That's fine. You get used to that."

The reforms that resulted from Spitzer's crusade are hardly revolutionary, but even his critics concede they were necessary. "I think the actual settlement and the changes it brought were good for the industry," one senior Wall Street executive said. "But I can make the argument that it should have been done by regulation, as opposed to enforcement."

Of course, it was the very failure of the national regulators that prompted Spitzer to get involved in the first place. Like Ferdinand Pecora, the counsel to the Senate Banking & Currency Committee who exposed Wall Street's double-dealing before and after the Great Crash of 1929, Spitzer uncovered behavior that big financial firms would have preferred to keep concealed. When the settlement is finally completed, he will release more of the e-mails he has collected, and not just from Merrill Lynch and Salomon Smith Barney. "These folks were earning twenty million dollars a year," he said. "And in many cases they were betraying the public's trust."

Some impoverished investors are already using the evidence that Spitzer uncovered to get a portion of their money back. In February, Merrill Lynch agreed to pay several hundred thousand dollars to a couple in Ohio who bought Internet stocks on its advice. Jacob Zamansky, the lawyer who sued Merrill Lynch on behalf of Debases Kanjilal two years ago, also organized this suit. "This case demonstrates what is going to happen when all the other e-mails are released," Zamansky said from his downtown office. "Lawyers like me will be able to use the evidence to extract restitution for investors. The major Wall Street firms will be fighting a war of attrition with their customers for the next five years."

With the analyst investigation almost over, Spitzer's officials are now examining other parts of the financial industry, including hedge funds that use their vast purchasing power to influence stock prices, and finance companies that lend to the poor, sometimes at extortionate rates of interest. Regardless of how these investigations go, many people in the Democratic Party think that Spitzer will run for governor in 2006, when George Pataki is unlikely to seek reëlection. Spitzer admits he is considering that possibility, and, if he does, Henry Blodget and Jack Grubman are sure to figure prominently in his campaign. "Given where we've come in the past year, and how aggressive we've been, and, frankly, the risks I took personally doing this, not only do I feel no remorse but I feel I can stand up and say, 'Fellas, judge me based on what we have done,' " he said. "I've lost friends for being too tough. I've lost friends for not being tough enough. So be it." ♦

LETTER FROM JORDAN

LITTLE IRAQ

Frustrated Iraqi exiles view the war with Saddam Hussein.

BY ISABEL HILTON

A little before noon on the morning of the first Friday of the war between the United States and Iraq, men were sweeping the small front yard of the pretty, hexagonal Al Tabba Mosque in Amman. The staff and a few customers at a nearby coffeehouse were gathered around a television in the corner, watching Al Jazeera's reports of the fighting near Basra, interviews with Kurdish refugees in the north, and U.S. claims that Iraqis were surrendering in the south. The mosque is on an unpaved road, near the bottom of one of Amman's seven hills, just off Garden Street, where there are many small stores dedicated to the paraphernalia of twenty-first-century technology—cell phones and computer cables, modems and adapters of all kinds. They were shut for the Muslim day of rest, and the neighborhood was quiet.

The Imam of the mosque had agreed to talk to me after midday prayers, and I was waiting near the gates, on a purple plastic stool that someone had thoughtfully put out for me. Opposite my perch three men removed crates of fruit from the back of a van. Another man maneuvered a cart heaped with fresh almonds, still juicy in their downy green shells. A slight, dark man with long, tightly curled black hair laid out a mat some fifteen feet long beside me and built a small tower of plastic wastebaskets at one end. He removed more items from crates and dusted each one carefully with a red broom before he added it to his meticulous display: packs of plastic clothespins; stainless-steel mugs; brightly painted trays; a column of rolls of adhesive tape, balanced one on top of the other; a small pile of cheap prayer mats in neon colors. Metal frying pans were arranged next to plastic badminton racquets and rubber gloves. He brushed off several packs of thread and put them beside some kitchen knives and scissors, then built a pyramid with three jars of Vaseline. Expandable wooden coatracks made up a six-story tower.

Worshippers, hunched against a biting wind, faces sombre, their heads full, perhaps, of the television images of the previous night's bombing of Baghdad, began to arrive at the mosque. They looked at me, unsmiling, and went inside, where the Imam was well into his warmup oration. I could hear him complaining about the effects of globalization on Muslim women. It was making them more Western, he lamented, and Islam was being weakened.

A police car was parked outside the gates of the mosque, and another one blocked the end of the side road. The curly-headed trader had filled half his mat. He put two packs of rubber balls, some headphones, a few manicure sets encased in vivid pink and orange plastic, and several large packets of colored balloons in the center of the mat, then paused and went to the other end, where he began arranging hammers, saws, chisels, tape measures, screwdrivers, wire strippers, and knives.

The Imam was saying that people were losing their moral sense. They should go back to the old ways. The Prophet, he reminded his followers, said that if you leave your religion everyone will step on you.

The mosque was now overflowing. Several pairs of shoes were lined up on top of the wall behind me, and their owners sat cross-legged in the yard. More stern-faced men had gathered in the street in front of the gates. The wind blew in sharp gusts, driving dark clouds across the sky, and icy spots of rain began to fall. The Imam described a battle in which armies of the faithful had defeated much larger forces of the infidel. The police officers rolled down their car windows and listened impassively.

The trader's display was by then complete. Every inch of his mat was covered. He smiled. I asked him where he was from. "Iraq," he replied, and his face registered a trace of pain. He said that his name was Ali and that he was twenty-nine. He hadn't slept in three days. He had been listening to the radio, desperate for news. His wife and two sons were in Baghdad.

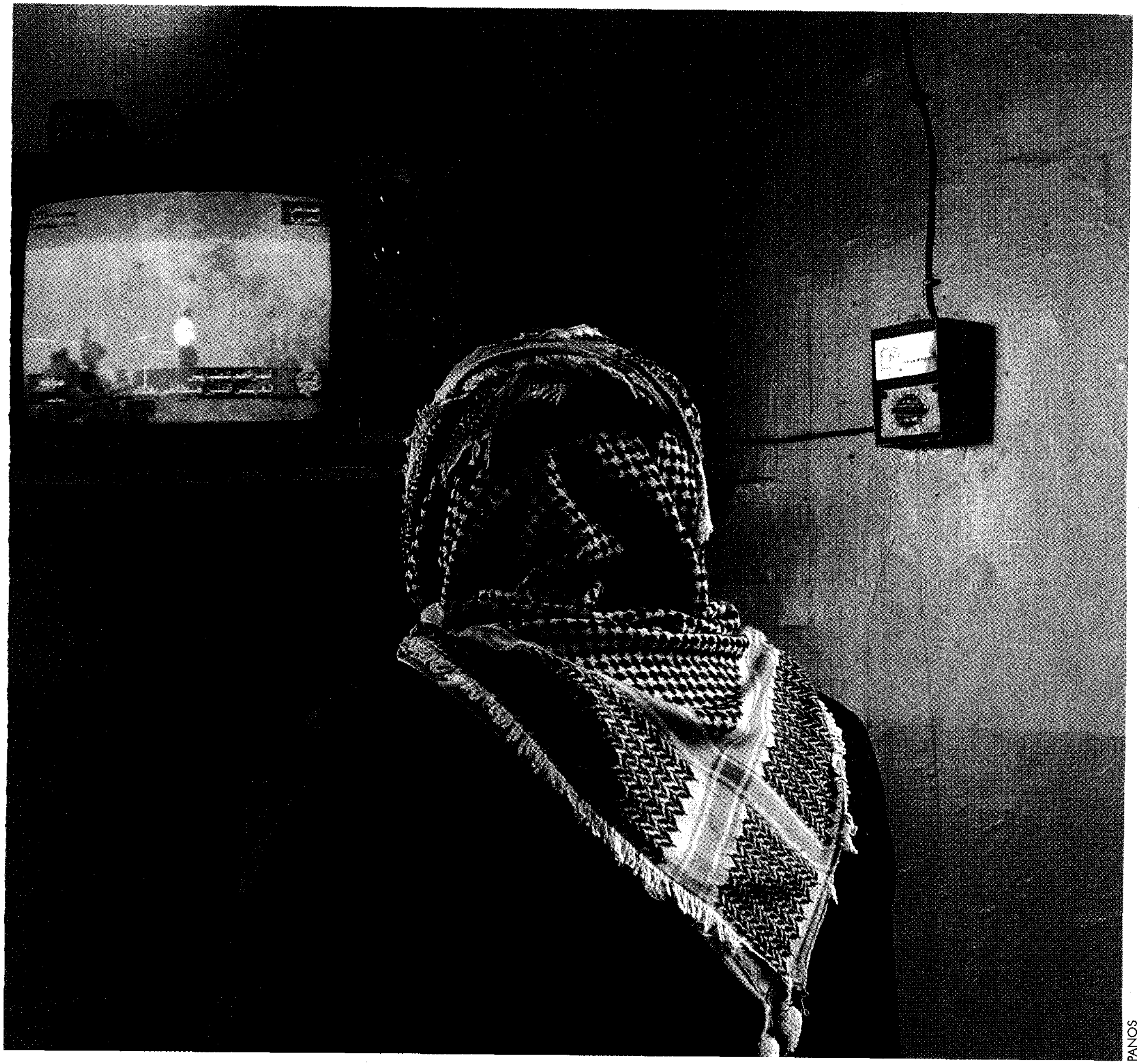
A Jordanian man came up to us to comment on current events. "Not war," he said. "Peace. What Bush and Sharon are doing is wrong." Ali looked at the ground. "It's not wrong," he said when the man left. "People don't know what is happening in Iraq."

The Imam's voice rose to an angry pitch as he denounced the war. "Any-

An Iraqi in a coffeehouse in Amman, Jord one who kills a believer will go straight to hell. Those thieves have come to steal our oil and kill our children. Please, Allah," he implored, "send them home losers—killed and wounded. Send them home in coffins." He was screaming, his voice hoarse in the loudspeakers that relayed his words and sent them echoing off nearby buildings. "Why is Israel allowed to have chemical and nuclear weapons and not us?" he roared. "George Bush thinks he is the new pharaoh, he thinks he's a god. But, no matter how weak you are, if you truly believe and are willing to sacrifice yourself, you will win." There were low murmurs of assent from the crowd as he asked the Almighty to destroy the Jews—eternally guilty, he said, of the betrayal of the Muslims in Medina—and to destroy America and Britain.

The Imam finished his sermon, and Ali and I moved across the road as the men in the yard began to pray, heads bowed, palms upraised. Ali had been in the Army in Iraq, he told me. His family had owned, among other things, a large tobacco shop in Baghdad. But he had been forced to flee to Jordan and had been dodging the Jordanian police for a year. If they caught him, they would send him back.

When the service was over, the Imam, a middle-aged man with a black beard streaked with gray, waited for me on the mosque steps. He wore a long robe, and a white cloth covered his head. "Before we talk," he said, "we must agree on one thing. I insist that you stay for lunch." We walked to a side door and he apologized for having left me sitting in the cold. "It is shaming for me," he said—this man who had a few minutes before called down the wrath of God on my country. "I should have asked you to wait in my house." He called a warning to the women inside the building that a man—my translator—was about to enter. We waited until they were safely behind a closed door, then climbed to the Imam's small


PANOS

tches Al Jazeera's coverage of the search for what was alleged to be a downed plane in Baghdad. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

"My boss is always telling me what to do."

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second-floor office. An aroma of meat and spices wafted up the stairs. The Imam said that our meal would be modest, and that if he had known before this morning that I was coming his wife would have made something more hospitable.

The Imam's name was Muhammad Ali Abu Hassan, and he was a lawyer by training. He had come to Jordan from Syria twenty-two years earlier, because of the Baath Party persecution of Syrian clerics. "It was like a gift from God," he said, "coming here." I remarked that his sermon had been a little strong, and he placed his hand over his heart. "It is because of my pain," he said, sighing. "Because of what is happening. I am upset with the people who rule America and with the Jews, because of their crimes against everybody." He wanted to explain to me about Islam and war. "It is God who judges us," he said. "If there is anything unfair, you yourself should not be unfair. We are all descended from Adam and Eve. God made different countries for us to live in in peace. Anything unfair will be punished by God on Judgment Day. If you are unfair, one day you will regret it, because you must sleep and your enemy does not sleep. God does not sleep."

It did not seem to be quite the case that he had made in his sermon. I asked why the police had waited outside the mosque. He smiled and touched his finger to his lips. "It's so the people cannot speak," he said. "People come out, and they are angry. The police wait. Maybe people hear the sermon and get emotional. People are very sensitive," he added, as though explaining an otherwise puzzling anger that might have seized his audience. "When a bird dies, the others grieve for it. How can people not suffer when they see others suffer?"

Islam, he said, permitted self-defense, but the Prophet had given strict instructions not to kill women and children, not to cut trees or burn down houses, not to offend the feelings of a defeated people. The rules of Islamic warfare, as he explained them, were of exquisite sensitivity. "When a nation has power," he said, "it's a gift from God. You thank God for that gift by being fair." In a brief and faint replay of his earlier self, he brought his fist down firmly on the small round table that stood between us.

The Imam's youngest son, a tall young man in his twenties, appeared with a tray of food—rice and pine nuts dressed with meat, a bowl of meatballs, and, arranged around the side, some long green chilies. Muhammad Ali Abu Hassan heaped generous portions into two bowls, carefully skimming the meat off the rice to give me and my translator the largest shares. Then he took a knife and set to slicing and seeding the chilies, laying them before us in a neat green row. He spoke digressively as we ate, quoting the Koran and telling stories of Islamic victories from distant history. His tone was gentle, but he was impervious to challenge. I tried to raise the question of Saddam Hussein's crimes. He was, after all, a secular Baathist who had persecuted believers, just as the Syrian Baath Party had done. "There is a saying in Arabic," the Imam replied. "The wise man discusses ideas, the less wise man discusses actions, and the foolish man discusses people." If Saddam was evil, he argued, it was up to the people to change the regime. "Is it worthy of me," he asked, "to get involved in what happens in my neighbor's house? America is attacking a whole country. They use depleted uranium, which will affect forty generations. America deals in power, not justice. But it will fall. Look at the Mongols. They were a huge military power. But they were defeated in Palestine by Muslims. Many converted. America does not know what is coming. It is a shame for humanity that they are leading the world.

"You have brought blessings on my house," he concluded, in a sudden change of subject. "The Koran says that a house that has a guest who is happy is a house that is blessed. Thank you."

I left, my hands full of sweets pressed on me by the Imam. I thanked his wife and daughter, who were still secluded in the lower room. Outside, a steady rain had set in. The street was deserted except for Ali, his small universe of household wares already packed away. He was waiting for me under a tree. We drove to a nearby shopping mall and drank warm, thick coffee in a fast-food restaurant full of Jordanian families eating fried chicken and drinking Pepsi. My translator showed me a text message that had just appeared on his cell phone—a general call to boycott U.S. goods.

Ali said that his once well-off family had got into trouble in 1995, when they started trading in hard currency. The government borrowed two hundred thousand dollars from them and promised to repay the loan with interest, but hard-currency trading was soon declared illegal, and the government refused to return the money. Half of it had been borrowed from others, and Ali's family had had to sell their house, their cars, and their shops to repay the debts. They had taken to selling vegetables in the streets, just to get by; then his father had left for Yemen. One day, the police, bent on arresting Ali, came looking for him with trumped-up charges of spying. He fled that day on a truck headed for Jordan. Eight miles short of the border, he got out and walked into the desert, crossing into Jordan far from the road. In Al Ruweishid, the first town on the Jordanian side, he was picked up by a truck that brought him to Amman. For a year, he had been selling goods for a Jordanian trader, sending what he could back to his family from the fifteen or so dinars (about twenty dollars) that he cleared on a good day.

I asked him if he had been happy in Iraq. "I had two days of happiness," he replied. "The day I got married and the day I got to Jordan." He said that he had had four close friends in Iraq. "We were inseparable," he said. "One was executed, one died in a war, one is in prison, and one is a refugee in Germany." He smiled. "He got hold of a document sentencing him to death. It was fake. He went to the embassy and told them he would be killed if they threw him out."

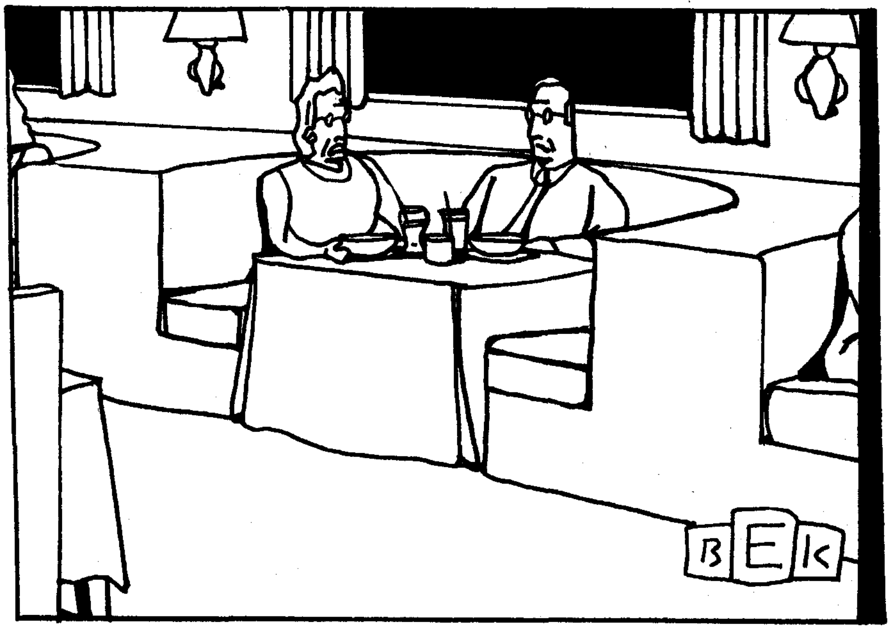
Ali said that he spends most of his time alone, anxiously watching television. Iraq would break up, he thought, but he did not seem to care much, as long as one day he was reunited with his wife and sons and could have a normal life.

Some three hundred thousand Iraqis were said to be living in Jordan before the war. In downtown Amman, there is a neighborhood known as Little Iraq, a few streets where exiles gather in cafés to play cards and smoke water pipes, and where information is traded—rumors of refugee status being granted, whispers of fake passports available for a price. I had met many people like Ali there in early March, illegal immigrants fleeing poverty or arrest, living on the margins of Jordanian society. At a tiny café on the ground floor of a tenement building, decorated with images of Shia saints on one wall and a poster of Charlie Chaplin on another, I sat with a group of Iraqis who were smoking and drinking sweet tea. They were reluctant to give their names. Some had been petty traders in Iraq, others were the splinters of a shattered middle class. They were tired, they said. Life in Jordan was awful. One of them, a former agricultural engineer, said that his brother had been a Fulbright scholar and was now a professor of genetics in the United States. I listened to long harangues on the evils of the Bush Administration. America would be defeated, I was told, and Bush was only after Iraq's oil.

I tried to talk to one man in private, and we climbed dark concrete stairs to a room furnished with two broken-down beds and a paraffin heater that was making little headway against the damp and the penetrating chill. A curtain hung lopsidedly across one end. The man said that I should call him Abu Omar. He sat cross-legged on the floor and began to tell me his story. He was a Shiite from southern Iraq who had been part of the uprising against Saddam in 1991. Two of his three brothers were dead and one was in exile in Iran. He traded across the border, dealing in small necessities unavailable in Baghdad, carrying remittances back to needy families from relatives abroad.

There was a noise behind the lopsided curtain, and Abu Omar signalled me to be quiet. A man who had been sleeping there came out and stood barefoot, warming his hands at the heater, eying my notebook. "I have just come from Baghdad," he said. "Things are normal there. People have everything. They have cars and food. They just come here for tourism." Abu Omar nodded. The interview was over. As we descended the stairs in the pitch dark, Abu Omar whispered that the man was a taxi-driver from Baghdad and was probably from the Mukhabarat, Saddam's security apparatus. As we said goodbye, Abu Omar told me that he was planning to go back to Baghdad. He wanted to be with his family.

The road from Amman to Baghdad runs east through several hundred miles of bleak, featureless desert to the Iraqi border, then across Iraq's western desert. On the Jordanian side, just beyond the miserable town of Al Ru-



"Why do we need some piece of paper to say that we hate each other?"

weishid, two grim refugee camps—lines of sagging tents and metal latrines in a flat expanse of blowing sand—have been built, one for Iraqis and one for third-country nationals. In the first week of the war, one camp held some two hundred Somalis and Sudanese—workers and their families, and students—who had been evacuated from Iraq and were going home. The Iraqi camp was empty.

Some people believed that there were no Iraqis because the Jordanian government, anxious to avoid a flood of refugees whom it could not afford to feed and who might never leave, was making entry into the country difficult. Others pointed to the dangers of the long bleak road from Baghdad. But buses going east were filling up. Iraqis, it seemed, were heading home. Bewildered television reporters climbed onto the departing buses, pointing out that bombs were raining down on Iraqi cities. The passengers shouted their defiance. They were going home to fight the invader, they said, and obliged the cameras with a few minutes of a song in praise of Saddam. "The U.S. soldiers are fighting for oil," they said. "We are fighting for our lives." The taxi-drivers I spoke to, lounging against their orange-and-white Chevrolet four-by-fours, confirmed the flow of passengers to Baghdad, even at the new price of six hundred dollars. Before the war, they admitted, it had been a hundred.

In the upper echelons of Jordanian society, one found a different kind of Iraqi exile—businessmen with their fortunes apparently intact, writers, artists, intellectuals, university professors, doctors and dentists quietly rebuilding their lives, former Army officers scrabbling for a living, haut-bourgeois families who had fled when the monarchy fell in Iraq, in 1958. It was a complex society, fragmented and suspicious in a city rife with spies and rumors. Suspicion had been bred by a long and cruel dictatorship to which most Iraqis, despite the advancing U.S. infantry, still felt hostage. As the terrible images of the bombing of Baghdad continued, there was little rejoicing among them. Some told me that they hated Saddam Hussein's regime, but the destruction of the city they loved was more than they could bear.

"Iraqis are proud," an advertising executive in his early thirties named Yassir Tabaqchali said to me. "They are passionate. And they all love Baghdad." He loaded a CD-ROM into his computer and showed me pictures of mosques, gracious riverside walkways, and royal palaces. "That one was bombed last night," he said, pausing at a photograph of a domed and turreted building.

"This song is very difficult for me emotionally. Plus, the chords are hard."

Yassir talked of his childhood, of days at school, of afternoon naps, of evenings spent chatting with neighbors' families as they dined in the cool dusk of their gardens. "Baghdad is so intense, so rich," he said. "Art, culture, music—it's all around you. There's nowhere like it." He talked of religious festivals, of tolerance and openness, of warmth and hospitality, of harmony among the myriad religious groups that had flourished there, of the special food and the ceremonies of a city that he had not seen since he was fourteen. He remembered as a small boy listening to his grandfather's friends discussing poetry and politics, architecture and philosophy. Now his family is scattered—some aunts still in Baghdad, his brothers and sisters in self-exile around the world. Exile, he said, was hard for Iraqis. "We had everything. There was a huge middle class. What hurts most is that for the last ten years the West has forgotten that we are a cultured people. Now the word 'Iraqi' means 'terrorist.' "

"People don't want to talk anymore," said Betool Khedairi, a young Iraqi writer whose first novel, "A Sky So Close," which was published in the United States two years ago, evokes life in Baghdad before and during the Iran-Iraq War. She said that her fellow-exiles were tired. "Twenty-five years," she said, "and three wars already. Give us a break." She tried to shut herself away to write, but images of the casualties of war intruded. "I saw a picture the other day, of a little boy with half a head. Last night, I couldn't sleep. I got up and wrote something." She had written about an April Fool's joke that her father played on her when she was a child. He announced at breakfast that the suspension bridge near her home had fallen into the Tigris River. She set off for school, wondering how she would get there without the bridge. "My bridge was bombed in the first Gulf War and lay in two pieces," she wrote. "Then my people built it up again. Now the second Gulf War has started, will it be bombed again? Leave our bridges alone. Our children want to go to school."

Khedairi said that, in a sense, she had never left Baghdad: "You cannot imagine the internal dialogue I have with my eight-thousand-year-old civilization every time I sit down at my desk. We love where we come from. I grew up surrounded by art and books of every kind. In the Arab world, they say that Egyptians write, Lebanese publish, and Iraqis read. But now, after wars, sanctions, children dying, unbelievable rates of cancer and disease, I am so angry I can hardly pick up my pen. I ask myself what is the use of writing? This horrific reality is telling fiction to step aside."

Some exiles raged against the sight of foreign troops on the soil of their homeland; others raged against Saddam and prayed for his overthrow, no matter what the cost. I sat in the back room of a shop selling upmarket furnishings and Iraqi antiques as its owner told me that her house in Baghdad had been wrecked three days before. It lay across the river from Saddam's palaces, and a stray American missile had landed in her street. Still, she said, she wanted more bombing. "These people in Arab countries who march," she told me angrily. "They didn't say a word when he gassed the Kurds." The Iraqi exiles wanted Saddam gone, but they agonized over the death and suffering. Many were deeply suspicious of the United States. The U.S. put him there, they said, and then in 1991 the U.S. betrayed them. Even now, they feared that Bush would strike a deal with Saddam.

One afternoon, I visited Ali Maher, the director of Darat al Funun, the House of Art, a cultural center in Amman. I went through a gate in a high wall and descended steep steps to a sloping hillside garden that surrounds several buildings. Maher, a large and expansive man with the sandy hair and blue eyes of his Circassian ancestors, was in his office in a sunny art gallery. "I am," he boomed, "the Sheikh of Amman." His family had settled here in the eighteenth century, he said, and inhabited what was then an empty valley. Now, at Darat al Funun, he displays art from across the Arab world, invites artists to work in his studios, hosts lectures and concerts, and is said to have the best art library in the country.

Maher wanted to show me around, and we went into the garden. "You are standing, my friend," he said, "in the Roman Temple of Hercules." The core of the complex is a house, built in the nineteen-twenties, in which T. E. Lawrence once stayed. Maher showed me what had been Lawrence's bedroom and is now part of the main gallery. Paintings by artists from Jordan, Yemen, and Iraq hung on the walls. "It is a tragedy," he said, "that even until recent times Iraq had the potential to lead the Arab world in terms of culture. Saddam, until he went crazy and invaded Kuwait, poured millions of dollars into promoting and exporting culture." The nineties, when the Iraqi economy went to pieces under sanctions, had been a kind of Golden Age for Maher, as artists and intellectuals flooded through Jordan, energizing the sleepy cultural world of Amman. Many had since moved on, he said, with a sigh, to greater success in New York or London, leaving the paintings that adorned his walls to mark their passage.

As we talked in Maher's office, a thin, dark-eyed man with a finely sculpted face beneath a checked cloth cap entered and sat silently. Maher greeted him, and then said to me, "Look, here is an example. This poor man was a professor of music in Baghdad. He plays the santir, an ancient and beautiful instrument. Now he can barely find enough to eat, and he weeps each night for his children in Baghdad. His daughter is three. He hasn't seen her since she was a few days old. Last week, he spoke to her, and he told me with tears in his eyes that he had heard the voice of a stranger."

The visitor sat upright in his chair, melancholy and impassive, dark rings beneath his eyes a testament to sleepless nights. His sadness pervaded the room. He had come to ask for the telephone number of a reporter he had met, an American who he hoped might be able to help him secure entry to the United States. "To be the cream of Arab society, so proud, and to go under like this," Maher said. "It hurts us."

I looked at the professor, wondering if he might not, after all, understand some of this speech. He sat immobile as Maher vented his indignation by fiddling with a computer game. After a long silence, the professor cleared his throat and began to speak quietly and slowly in English. "In Baghdad," he said, "there was art in every home—a painter, a musician. Many left, but Iraq will produce more." He continued in Arabic. Maher translated. "You don't build culture in a few years," he said. "It takes thousands of years." The professor was astonished, Maher told me, at the image of Iraq in the Western media, as a place of cruelty and religious intolerance. "My own family are Sunnis from the north," the professor said. "One sister married a Sunni, one a Shia. One brother married a Kurd and could have married a Christian. Why not?" He shrugged and fell silent, contemplating the wall above my head. Then he began to speak again. "He has something to say to you, if you do not use his name," Maher told me.

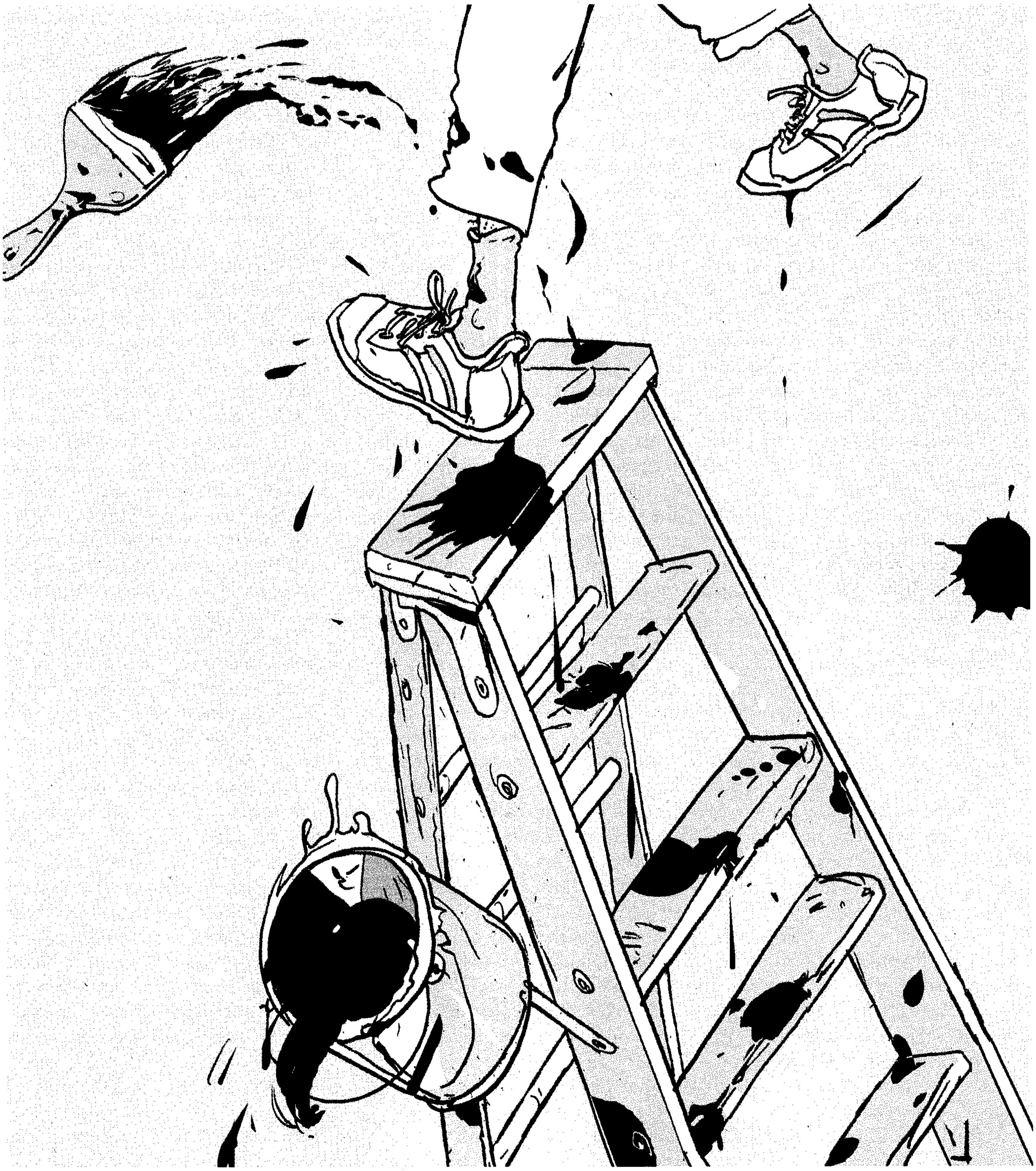
"I am one of millions who hate Saddam for reasons everybody knows," the professor said. "But the mistake that America and Britain are making is that they thought they could occupy Iraq easily. It's true that Iraqis dream of the day that they will recover their freedom, but not through these means. And I am sure that Iraqis feel they are losing their dignity. For that, we witness this resistance. That you came by force. I am just a simple person, but even I could have come up with better ideas about how to get rid of this regime. I think that America just wanted to show the world how powerful and ruthless it could be."

The professor left. Ali Maher invited me to a concert. "We have an Iraqi musician," he said. "He is going to play Bach. Do you like Bach? Bring your friends." I promised to come, and we climbed the steep steps to the street, Maher treading heavily behind me. "The Middle East," he said, "was cursed by all its prophets, and since then we have had endless wars." As he drove me to my hotel, he told a story: "A visitor came to see the second Caliph"—who led the Muslim community between 634 and 644, when it conquered most of Arabia and part of the Byzantine Empire—"and found him sleeping under a tree. Just an old man, fat, sweating. No guards. When he woke, the visitor said to him, 'Caliph, you have brought justice, so now you have peace. You can sleep.' " Maher laughed. "The Americans, now. Can they sleep?" ♦

FICTION

THE NIECE

BY MARGOT LIVESEY



He had replaced five light bulbs that day, and by late afternoon he couldn't help anticipating the soft ping of the element flying apart whenever he reached for a switch. The third time—the fixture on the landing—the thought zigzagged across his mind that these little explosions were a sign, like the two dogs he had come across in the autumn, greyhound and bulldog, locked together on the grassy slope of the local park. He had given them a wide berth; still, he'd felt responsible on the bus the next day when a man had turned puce and slid to the floor. By the fifth light, though, he had given up on superstition and was blaming London Electricity. Some irregularity in the current, some unexpected surge, was slaughtering the bulbs.

The Barrows were away, at a conference in Latvia, which was why the decorating was being done now, but they were the sort of people who kept spares—he could tell from their orderly supplies of toilet paper and condiments—just not in any place he could find. Meanwhile, he gradually emptied the upstairs rooms, slipping the bulbs from bedside lights and desk lamps. Next time he went to the shops, he'd pick up a pack and add it to his bill under "Miscellaneous."

Later, of course, the little zaps made perfect sense. But when the doorbell rang Zeke set aside the wallpaper steamer without a shard of premonition. Often, if he was up a ladder, he didn't answer the knocks and rings of late afternoon—after all, they were never for him—but now the pallor of the sky, the flashes of light and dark, the weariness of working alone all conspired to make even the prospect of rebuffing a double-glazing salesman, or a greasy-haired collector for Oxfam, a pleasure. Last Friday, in a similar mood, he'd found a chap on the doorstep, thin as a junkie, pretending to be blind. He had the dark glasses, the white cane, the fluttery stuff with the hands. "You're a painter," the man had said, sniffing slightly. Zeke had ended up giving him fifty pence.

"But how do you know he was a con man?" his mother had asked that night on the phone. "People compensate."

"I was looking out of the window and I saw him in the street, checking the 'A to Z.'"

"Barmy," his mother said, but there was a note of admiration in her voice, as if a fake blind man might be closer to her ideal son than a conscientious decorator.

Now the door swung open and a woman, no collecting tin, no clipboard, filled his vision. He hadn't replaced the bulb in the hall yet, and in the dim light her features took a few seconds to assemble. He made out abrupt dark eyebrows above a substantial nose and plump, glistening lips, as if the inside of her mouth had flowed alarmingly onto the outside.

For a moment, Zeke was baffled. Then he went through the steps he'd learned from the poster at the clinic. Eyes wide, a glimpse of teeth, corners of the mouth turning up rather than down: usually these indicated a smile that could, he knew, mean anger but more often meant friendliness. Yes, she was smiling, although not necessarily at him. Her expression had clearly been prepared in advance, but Zeke admired the way she held her face steady at the sight of him, and of his work clothes. His jeans and shirt were so paint-spattered as to be almost a separate entity.

"Good afternoon." She stretched out her hand and, seeing his, white with Spackle, faltered, neither withdrawing nor completing the gesture.

"Hi," he said, hating the single, stupid syllable. She was tall for a woman, his height save for the doorstep, and dimly familiar, though not as herself. As she began to speak, he realized who she reminded him of: the bust of Beethoven on his father's piano. Something about the expansiveness of her features, the way her tawny hair sprang back from her forehead.

"I'm the niece," she said.

Her breath streamed toward him, a chilly plume, carrying more words, perhaps an entire sentence, which Zeke lost as he blinked away Beethoven. "I'm the decorator," he said. "The Barrows are away."

"But they told you I would be here," she said with no hint of a question.

She stooped to pick up the large black suitcases on either side of her, and as she straightened he saw that she was pregnant. She stepped past him—the word "pushed" came to mind—and set the cases, gently, at the foot of the stairs. "Where are you working?"

He nodded toward the living room. She stood in the empty doorway—the door was at the strippers—surveying the room. Under the influence of her attention, Zeke saw again what his work had revealed: the ragged plaster painted not a single color but in pale bands of blue and brown, gray and yellow, the work of some unknown artist. In the middle of the floor the furniture was piled up and draped in dust sheets, like some ungainly prehistoric animal.

"Groovy," she said. "We should do a mural—hunting and fishing, golfing and shopping."

"I don't think your aunt and uncle . . ." Then he caught himself: humor. That had always been tricky for him. Even the question about the hen crossing the road could make him pause. "I told them it was a big job. You never know what you'll find when you strip off the paper. And Emmanuel, the guy who helps me, did his back in."

"How?" she said.

"What?"

"How"—she patted the small of her back—"did he bugger up his back?"

"Reaching for a corner. Snooker, not painting." In the bare space, their voices took on burly undertones. Hers was deep, anyway. As for his, Zeke wasn't sure. He had read that humans hear their own voices through the jaw, not the air; every time a tooth is lost or filled, the timbre changes.

"Aren't they due back this week?" she said.

"The nineteenth, they told me."

Finally she shrugged off her coat, revealing a dark-green dress. The heating was on full blast, not his bill, and the house was as snug as a tea cozy. She retreated to sling her coat over the banister and then came back into the room with that greedy, pushing motion. As she turned, he saw again, silhouetted against the window, her belly. Who would have expected the whey-faced Barrows to have a niece like this? And older than he'd thought, he saw now, as the light caught the little line like an exclamation mark between her eyebrows.

"Don't let me stop you," she said, her nose, her lavish mouth, bearing down, "working."

A sentence appeared in Zeke's head: *I'd like to tie you to the bed.* How did that get there, inside his brain, about this woman?

"I was taking a break," he said. "Anyway."

He was no longer certain that she was ugly, only that he wanted to keep looking

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to make sure. But in the empty room he didn't dare. This must be why people had furniture: not just for comfort but, like clothing, for camouflage. And why interrogation and torture were traditionally carried out in sparsely furnished spaces.

"When I was fifteen," she said, and her tone was such that he couldn't tell if she was talking to him or to herself, "my parents let me paint my room. We were a family—this probably sounds absurd—who never painted anything. First I wrote on the wall the things I wanted to be rid of: hypocrisy, mother, father, brother. Then I slapped on the paint, deep purple."

"Did it work?"

Her head swivelled in his direction, and he had the sense of being seen at last. "Not," she exhaled, "entirely. But I did like the feeling of making my mark. Do you ever get the glums?"

"No," he said. And then the word seemed to leap from his larynx: "Sometimes." To his own stupefaction, he imagined telling her the whole deformed story, the one his mother wanted to wrap in euphemisms, like offal in newspaper, and chuck in the dustbin. "Why 'brother'?" he asked.

"I have one." Her eyebrows dashed together. "In America, maybe." She seized a wallpaper brush and fingered the gluey bristles. "Years ago, I was hitching near Oxford, and a polystyrene salesman picked me up. The back seat of his car was full of those nice white containers, all different sizes. It started to rain, bucketing down, the windscreen wipers going lickety-split, and he said, 'Do you ever think of killing yourself?' His voice was so casual, I was sure I'd misunderstood, like you just now. I said, 'Sometimes.' "

Zeke blinked again rapidly.

"Then he asked if I'd read 'Steppenwolf.' I said yes, though to be honest I wasn't sure. It's one of those books that were in the ether for a while. I looked over at this porky, red-faced, middle-aged bloke and his eyes were brimming. 'I have,' he said. 'Every day I think of it. There's always the razor and the knife.' "

She set aside the brush and flicked a roll of lining paper. "Are you taking off the paper just to put it on again?"

The Barrows, her aunt and uncle, had asked that, too. He explained about the old houses of London, how the walls were held up by wood-chip paper. When you removed it, the best way to get a smooth finish was to put on lining paper and paint over that.

"Cup of tea?" he suggested, and, cursing himself, backed out of the room. Once, maybe twice a year, he had something that resembled a conversation, something that wasn't about fish fingers or the telly or who was effing whom. And, idiotically, he bolted. Blind rejection was one thing. To be seen, then dismissed, was quite another. He might hate his mother's mealymouthed phrases—Oh, Zeke's just under the weather—but the day, six years earlier, that she turned her shiny blue eyes upon him and said, "You'll end up in the loony bin if you carry on like this," he had felt as if a pickaxe were aimed at the very center of his forehead.

Afraid to return to the living room, he hovered beside the kettle. Give me another surge, he thought, winging his request to the head office. He heard a sound from the hall, one thud followed by another.

"Did I scare you?"

Seeing her stocking feet, he understood not only the noises he'd just heard but those that came most nights through his bedroom ceiling: one shoe, two shoes.

"Which side are you on?" he said.

"Roundheads or cavaliers? Arsenal or Chelsea? Flat earth or solar system?"

"Mr. or Mrs. Barrow." He pushed a mug of tea toward her. "Whose niece are you?"

"Mr.'s—can't you tell?" Her eyelids grew wide and her chin rose, as if defying him not to notice the similarity. "Maybe I could take Emmanuel's place."

Bewildered, Zeke stared at her feet, not broad like her hands but long and slender in dark-purple hose. Was this humor, too?

"He's not around," she said. She sounded so definite that for a moment Zeke wondered if she somehow knew Emmanuel. Then he remembered that he was the one who had told her about him, the snooker and the bad back. "Perhaps I could lend a hand."

"You?"

She gave a hoot. "I'm not offering to spend twelve hours a day up a ladder, but some things are easier with two people, like folding sheets."

I am, Zeke thought, profoundly boring, a notion not contradicted by her announcement that she was going to check out the sleeping arrangements. Heels striking the floor, she carried her tea upstairs.

Normally he quit at five, but today he kept pressing Spackle into even the smallest cracks until close to six-thirty. Then, in the face of an unbroken silence from above, he admitted defeat. He tidied his tools in the way that his old boss Ferdinand had taught him. The two of them had been united in their meticulous attitude toward objects and their hesitation toward people. "You know, they say the brain has pathways," Ferdinand had said. "Mine are covered with sand." Zeke washed his hands, and called the news of his departure, wanly, up the stairs.

"Wait." There she was on the landing. "Are you coming tomorrow? When?" Her face was once again indistinguishable.

"I aim for eight," he told her. "Shall I bring up your suitcases?"

"No."

The word hit him with such force that he grabbed the banister. He was still wondering what he'd done wrong when she added, at more normal volume, "Thanks. I need the keys." She swam down the stairs, stopping on the last one, hand outstretched. He should have guessed then, from the way her eyes fastened on his, that something was awry, that she wasn't on good terms with her aunt and uncle or that Ms. F.—weren't all fetuses female at first?—was a problematic guest, but the warmth of her breath, the lilt of her perfume, expunged rational thought. Helpless, he laid the keys in her palm.

"Will you be up to let me in?" he said.

"Up with the lark." She made a flapping motion with one hand. "Up with the milkman."

"Are you all right?" he found himself asking.

"There's always the razor and the knife," she said softly. Then—he pictured all the buses in London rising an inch into the air—she leaned forward and pressed her lips to his cheek.

The next morning, Zeke rang the bell, knocked, tried the knob. The door stayed resolutely shut, the windows adamantly blank. He even bent down and called, foolishly, through the letter box, "Hello, it's me. Zeke." By the end of five minutes, he was holding on to himself, like a kite on a gusty day. He fished around in his pockets, his bag, and was rewarded with an unmistakable vision of his mobile phone, lying on the floor beside his bed. As he walked to the corner, he counted the fag ends on the pavement, some crushed, some whole, to keep himself from floating away: seven, eight, eleven. Twice he had to stop and retrace his steps to make sure he hadn't missed one. Look down, he thought, not up. In the forecourt of the underground station, he found a free phone and, trying not to think of all the hands, the mouths, that had touched it, he picked up the receiver and dialled the Barrows' number. The answering machine clicked on with Mr. Barrow's brief, nasal message. She's popped out for a paper, he told himself, she's taking a bath. Walking back, he forgot the cigarettes and placed his feet, carefully, in the middle of each paving stone.

At the house, nothing had changed. He knocked, rang, shouted again, before climbing in through the living-room window. He had opened it the day before while using the steamer and, in the excitement of her arrival, had neglected his usual security measures. Now the ease with which the sash slid up made him feel stricken; he had left her at the mercy of any passing lunatic or thief.

Inside, he began to tiptoe toward the hall, then, reconsidering, attempted his normal gait. "Hello. Anyone home?"

He turned things on: kettle, radio, lights. No flash and zap today. He made the obligatory cup of tea and set to work. But after ten minutes of sanding he couldn't bear it. The possibility that she was gone bounded into his head and ricocheted around. And he didn't even know her name. He laid the sandpaper aside and, wiping his powdery hands on his jeans, climbed the stairs.

He had reconnoitered the first day he had the house to himself—he always did, flitting through bedrooms, checking wardrobes and drawers, cupboards and desks. It wasn't what Emmanuel thought—snooping for kinky underwear or helpful pills—but the way he coped with strange houses; he picked out a hiding place. Sometimes, when he felt particularly shaky, he even stored provisions there: a bottle of water, a packet of biscuits. Here, at the Barrows', he'd chosen the pedestal desk in the

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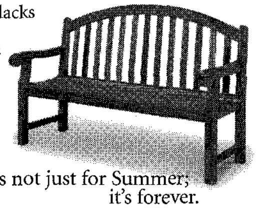

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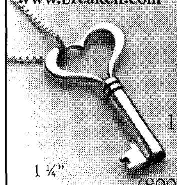

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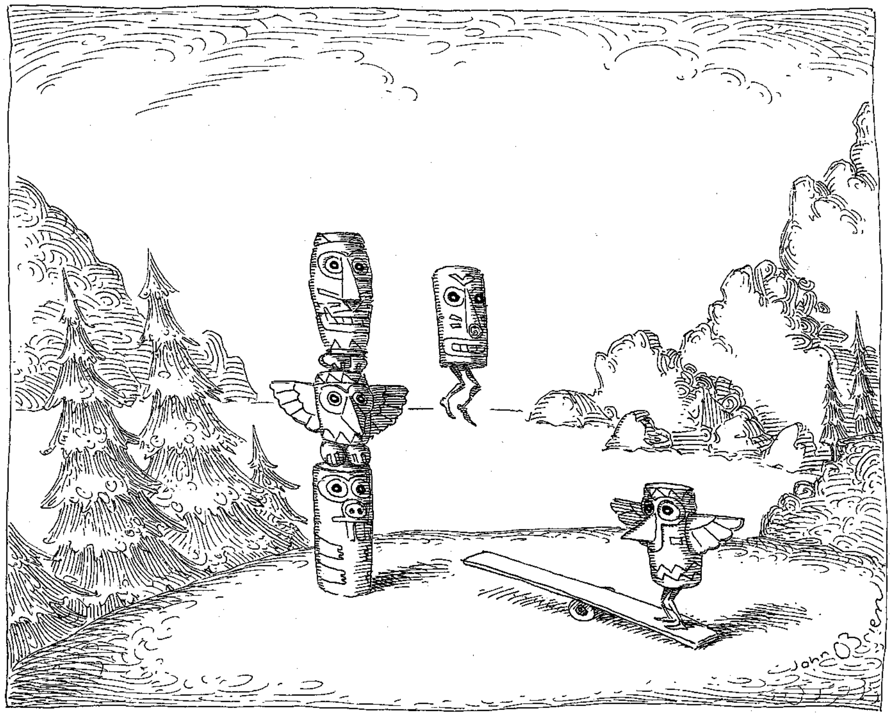

study. With his knees drawn up, he fit almost perfectly into the dark U.

Now he moved from one light-bulbless room to another. In the master bedroom, the tattered floral wallpaper made his teeth ache. As did the disorder that seemed, mysteriously, to have worsened since his last visit. The drawers of the dressing table were half-open and several of the photographs on top lay face down. In the study, next to the desk, the row of machines—computer, printer, fax, even a photocopier—winked at him with little red or green lights. Mrs. Barrow worked at home, she'd explained, editing textbooks. Last, their son—Sean's? Seth's?—old room. She had mentioned him at their first meeting, only to be cut off by her husband in a tone that suggested the boy was already halfway to hell in a handcart. Zeke knew that his mother had for several months reacted to his name in a similar fashion.

Had he ever been so glad to see a suitcase? The larger of the two lay open at the foot of the bed. Not meaning to snoop, he stared at the contents. Almost half the case was filled with small, multicolored boxes of the kind used for earrings and necklaces; the remainder was occupied by two camera cases, a portable CD player, a clock, and a pair of silver candlesticks. For a moment, Zeke was tempted to count the boxes, each so orderly and distinct. Then he stepped over to the bed and knelt to bury his face in the pillow. Here she was, and here.

The scrape of the front door hurled him to his feet. "Hello," he called, starting down the stairs.

She was in the hall, levering off her boots, heel to toe. "I went to get us fried-egg sandwiches." She flourished a paper bag.

"I broke in," he offered.

"Brilliant," she said, handing him the bag. In the kitchen he set out plates, salt and pepper, sheets of paper towel. He had had his usual bowl of cereal only an hour ago; but now, following her example, he ate ravenously. She was wearing a faded blue sweatshirt, the sleeves rolled up, the hem stretched tight. How far along was she, he wondered, trying to recall Emmanuel's sister's configuration at various stages. Six months, maybe seven. Watching her pepper the egg, he realized that he had dreamed about her the night before.

Only a fragment remained: she was winching a metal bucket, brimming with water, out of a well. But before he could tell her about it she was talking again, describing her stint as an office cleaner when she'd eaten a fried-egg sandwich every day. "We were meant to start at six. Instead we'd come in at eight-thirty, spray Lysol around, and sit down to our sannies. When the suits arrived at nine, they assumed we were taking a well-earned break after hours of work." She licked her lips, first lower, then upper, in a glistening circle. "So what are we doing today? Putting up paper?"

He began to stammer. He was making good progress. Besides, her aunt and uncle were paying him a fair wage.

"I'm serious," she said. "I need something to take my mind off things."

At the time, he assumed a covert reference to Ms. F. Later, when he went back and scrutinized her every utterance, it became one of those mysterious manhole covers, briefly raised over the sewer of secrecy.

Before he could voice any further objections—the dust, the fumes—she had spotted a pair of overalls hanging on the back door, and the next thing he knew she had scrambled into them and was demonstrating how well they fit; her belly split the front like a chestnut its shell. "Come on," she said. "I bet you're paid by the job, not the hour."

At first he was embarrassed telling a woman, older than him by perhaps a decade, what to do, but she turned out to be much more biddable than Emmanuel. As they finished the sanding, he on the ladder, she on foot, she lobbed questions in his direction, and despite her careless manner he sensed that she was, in fact, listening to his answers. Whereas the doctors, to a man and woman, as soon as he opened his mouth, had focussed on pencil sharpeners, radiators, doorknobs. They were paid—not enough, not by him—to barely feign attention, scribble a couple of notes, and, as quickly as possible, write a prescription that would propel him, thank God, out of their offices. But this woman, with her fierce brow, her chapped knuckles, for whatever reason, actually seemed interested.

"So," she said, folding the sandpaper onto the sanding block, "is decorating the family business? Or your heart's desire?"

"Neither." He was longing to ask about her, so he offered himself up, a pound of apples, a fistful of bananas. "My father was a greengrocer in Brighton. Got up at four every day, except Sunday, to buy the fruit and veg. Then he worked until seven at night, hauling sacks of potatoes and chatting up housewives.”

“Did you live near the sea?” she asked.

“Not far. If I stood on my bed on tiptoe, there was a tiny triangle of water.” He had done this precisely once, dismayed at what the maneuver had revealed. Now he climbed down the ladder, moved it four feet, climbed back up, and started on the next stretch of cornice.

“I used to think,” she said, “that life would make sense if I could see the sea every day.”

“Not for me. A street makes sense, a house makes sense, but the sea just goes on and on: wave, wave, wave. I couldn’t wait to get away. We were ten when we moved.” Even the absent-minded doctors had caught these sorts of slips. “Do you see yourself as two people?” a man with a wedge-shaped head had asked, gleefully. Barely one, he had thought but not said. She tapped her sandpaper and said nothing.

In London, Highbury, his father had a new shop, bigger and busier. “I used to help, evenings, Saturdays. Lovely tomatoes. Nice, juicy oranges. Then one day one of our regulars, Mrs. Oma, said, ‘When you’re the boss,’ and suddenly I understood why my father was always pounding away at me about what to order, how to price stuff. I started to pay attention in school, do my homework. It drove him mad. ‘Do you want to be a dreamer all your life,’ he used to say, ‘head stuck in a book?’ ”

“Careful,” she said.

Beneath his savage sanding the ladder swayed like a sapling in the wind. He couldn’t tell the story without jumping back into that old, hopeless arena. Over fresh sandpaper, he admitted that he had studied accounting at university. “I wanted to do anthropology—I’d read a book about the rain-forest tribes of Papua, New Guinea—but I didn’t have the nerve. I needed to know that I was heading toward a job.”

She didn’t ask the obvious question, which, as they began to measure and cut the lining paper, enabled him to answer it. The day after his final exams, he couldn’t leave the house.

“The people I shared with had all gone away, and I’d been looking forward to having the place to myself. But as soon as I stepped outside I worried that I’d left the gas on or the iron or the lights or I hadn’t locked the door or I hadn’t locked the window or I hadn’t flushed the toilet or the cat’s water bowl was empty or my mother was trying to phone. It didn’t matter how often I checked, it didn’t matter if I wrote down that I’d checked, I’d reach the street and have to go back. Remember in ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ when the Lilliputians tie him down? It was like that. Hundreds of strands of anxiety tugging me back. Soon it was easier not to try to get away.”

He slid the scissors through the paper, enjoying the smooth mutter of the blades. “When I got better, I knew I couldn’t be an accountant. I liked numbers, but I couldn’t cope with the people on the other end of them. One of our neighbors did odd jobs, so I started helping him.” A strip of paper released from the roll curled back on itself and fell to the floor; he began on the next. “Ferdinand is—” He stopped, searching for the word that would embody his friend, then gave up. “I felt O.K. with him, and, gradually, he wanted to retire, so I took over the business.”

“Your dad must have gone nuts.”

A hot, dry wind blew through the room. Zeke dropped the scissors. “Break,” he said.

He started to ask questions, the same ones she’d asked him—where she grew up, what her mum and dad did; after all these hours it seemed too late to ask her name. “You know,” she said, “when you reach a certain age people don’t ask what your parents do. They ask what you do.”

But, without waiting, she went on. “My mother, after years as a bored housewife, runs a glorified junk shop. She invents amazing provenances for her goods: this hot-water bottle warmed the feet of Marie Antoinette; Dr. Johnson dipped his pen in this very inkwell. My father used to be a schoolteacher. Now he’s a chancer. He’ll bet on anything: horses, dogs, which of his children will go to rack and ruin first. He’s the kind of person who tells everyone else in the cinema to shut up and then chats away for the rest of the film. I take after both of them.”

“Do you mean that?” Zeke said.

She stopped and looked at him, eyes flickering. “Yes and no. You know how it is. You make every effort not to be like your parents and then you catch yourself tying your shoelaces in exactly the fussy

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way that your mother does. Or, even worse, doing something you don't really want to do—leaving a huge tip after a bad meal—just to be different from them."

She didn't mention Ms. F., nor did he. Every so often, Zeke would catch himself wondering whether she really existed. Then he would turn around—or her mother would—and there she was.

At lunchtime, she opened a tin of tomato soup and he made cheese sandwiches. They worked on through the darkening afternoon. Oughtn't she to take a rest? he asked. They could finish the lining paper tomorrow. But she shrugged off the suggestion. The street lights came on, buzzy amber splodges, and in the houses opposite curtains were drawn. He bungled the last piece of paper, an awkward corner, then bungled it again. "If at first you don't succeed," she chanted from the foot of the ladder, "try, try, and try again. That was my English teacher's favorite saying: Robert the Bruce and his stupid spider."

Two years ago, even one, he might have presumed himself the spider, vermin to be trampled underfoot; today he recognized encouragement. He mounted the ladder once again and, while she described the Scottish king, hiding in a cave, drawing inspiration from the arachnid's repeated efforts to anchor its web, he smoothed the top of the paper into place and, slowly descending, pressed the seams together.

Now what? he thought, glancing around the neatly papered room. Dismissal?

"Can you make a fire," she said, "while I forage?"

"A fire?" He saw himself soaking the dust sheets with petrol, the *whoompf* of flame engulfing the mute furniture. But then she pointed at the fireplace, the grate messy with cinders. Investigation proved that the Barrows had supplies. He rolled newspapers, added kindling, fire lighter, and coal, tasks he hadn't performed since leaving drafty Brighton. Meanwhile, from the kitchen came various sounds, some recognizable, some not. When he went in, she was at the stove, stirring a saucepan. "Frozen lasagna," she announced. "Tinned spinach, fresh carrots. There's beer in the cupboard under the stairs."

"Thanks. I think I'll have some Ribena."

"Don't you drink?"

"Not often. It makes me . . ." He hesitated between "weird" and "stupid" and eventually chose the latter.

"Not so stupid you don't know it." She reached for a glass, and he saw the froth of beer. Stop, he wanted to say. Ms. F. doesn't deserve to start life with a hangover. But before he could think of a polite way, or indeed any way, to voice his concern she was shouting, "Fuck, fuck."

"Once again, zero income from endorsements."

He watched in amazement as she grabbed the saucepan and banged it against the stove, once, twice. Carrots flew.

And then he was in the hall. He had seen her wet lips stretched wide, her eyes starting out of her head, not gestures that had appeared on the poster but, combined with the shouting, fairly unequivocal. In the living room he bent to tend the fire, fighting the desire to climb out of the window and never come back. The first flare of the kindling had died down and the coals were glowing dully when he heard her footsteps.

"Sorry. I got a little carried away."

He could feel her standing behind him. Don't touch me, he thought. *Do.*

"I take my cooking seriously," she said. "Even if it is just tins. What makes you angry?"

You drinking beer, Emmanuel being a wanker, my life. Using the tongs, he moved a knob of coal an inch to the right, an inch to the left.

"If I promise to be quiet, will you come back and keep me company?"

She walked away, not waiting for an answer, and he thought of all the tiny motions—the vertebrae one after another sliding against each other, the hip joints swivelling in their sockets, the tarsals and metatarsals flexing and straightening—that make up departure. Yet the most mysterious motion, the one that couldn't be named or diagrammed, was what spilled a mood into a room. How he knew, with absolute certainty, that she wasn't taking his answer for granted, but simply leaving him alone to figure it out.

As he sat back down at the kitchen table, she was peering into the oven. "Is there a reason," she said, "for upstairs to be plunged in Stygian gloom?"

He told her about the five light bulbs of the day before. "Interesting." She turned, cheeks flushed from anger or the oven, to face him. "I'm O.K. with appliances, usually. But I can't wear a watch for more than a day or two before it goes haywire. Apparently, I make my own electricity."

They ate off a card table in front of the fire in the freshly papered room. She had found candles in the cutlery drawer, and in their light the ladder cast a hangman's shadow. They talked about computers, and whether a person could ever really disappear, and if life was better in Papua, New Guinea. She told a story about her grandfather, who had fought in the First World War. Then, at last, she spoke about herself, but almost, Zeke noticed, as if she were talking about another person. Well, that was something he understood. He often felt as if the events in his life, the things people claimed he'd said and done, were really part of a stranger's story. His biology teacher at school had explained that the cells in the body are replaced every seven years. No wonder we don't always feel like our old selves.

"Once, years ago, I had a friend. She was the opposite of me: tiny, neat, ferociously ironic. We shared an office at my first real job, and three or four nights a week we'd go out for a drink after work. I couldn't get enough of her company."

He watched her lips, her eyes, her cheeks, the muscles of her throat and her forehead, and fewer and fewer of her words reached him. But when her story was done, the candles guttering, the fire dying, her face wore an expression that he understood. He took her hand. "You did what you could," he said, and squeezed her palm against his own. The effort of consolation made him bold.

Her face changed inexplicably, the light in her eyes leaping and fading. Had he done something wrong? Then he understood. With his free hand, he snuffed the flames.

She rose to her feet, the whole magnificent swell of her, pulled him to his feet, and led him up the stairs. "Help me," she said, presenting the overalls. Soon she was naked, ample and unabashed. Beside her Zeke felt pallid, sticklike. Can this be happening? he thought. Then she was pulling back the covers, and he was lost. Ms. F., fully acknowledged, never mentioned, lay between them.

Hours, days, weeks later she said, "I have to tell you something." For a moment she was silent, and he pictured, in the darkness, her eyebrows drawing together. "I'm no more Mr. Barrow's niece than I am a cavalier." She made a little rasping sound. "Actually, I've never laid eyes on either of the Barrows. A friend told me that the house was empty and I needed somewhere to go."

Even as she spoke, he was counting their contiguous places—thighs, hips, elbows, shoulders, floating ribs, biceps, calves—and wherever they touched he felt the slight tingling of her electricity.

"It's not fair," he had told his mother one day after school. "I can't lie like the other boys."

"Everyone lies," she had said. "You're just a slow learner."

Now he remembered how her face had changed when he asked whose niece she was.

"I knew that," he said slowly.

"And don't you wonder who I am? What I'm doing here? You saw what was in my suitcase, didn't you?"

He searched high and low, the spiral of his right ear, the knotted place behind the left temple, the hollow where his skull met his spine, the airy lattice inside his forehead, but he couldn't find a trace of wondering. The Barrows had insurance. Let her take whatever she needed for herself, and for Ms. F. What he did find, regrettable but obdurate, was his old fear of the unfamiliar.

"I have to go home," he said. "I'm sorry. It's not you. I just can't handle strange houses."

She touched his cheek.

The next morning, Zeke knocked only once before setting aside the fried-egg sandwiches—he'd asked for brown bread in an effort to offset last night's beer—and sliding the blade of his penknife under the snib of the side window. He left the bag of sandwiches on the kitchen table and climbed the stairs, hoping to find her still in bed, hoping to slip in beside her and bring as many of his current cells as possible into proximity with hers. And this time, he thought, however stupid, however embarrassing, he would ask her name.

The bed was unmade, empty and cold to the touch, the suitcases gone. At the foot of the bed the rug was rolled up and, spread-eagle on the bare wooden boards, lay the overalls, neatly buttoned, arms and legs wide, like an empty person. Only when Zeke tried to pick them up did he discover the three-inch nails that skewered the collar, pinned the cuffs and ankles to the floor. ♦

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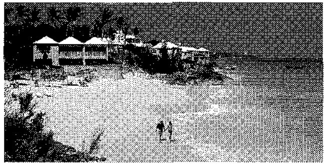

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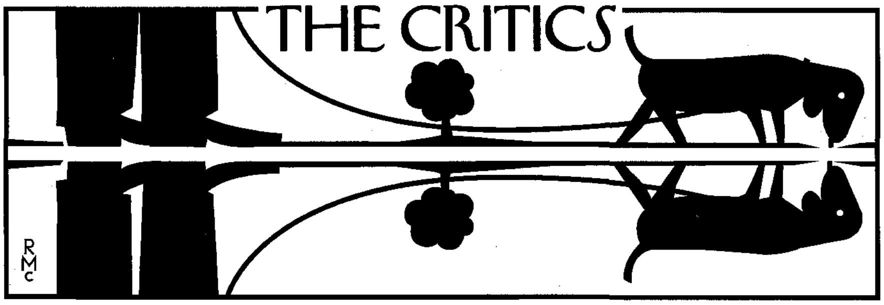


A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE THIN ENVELOPE

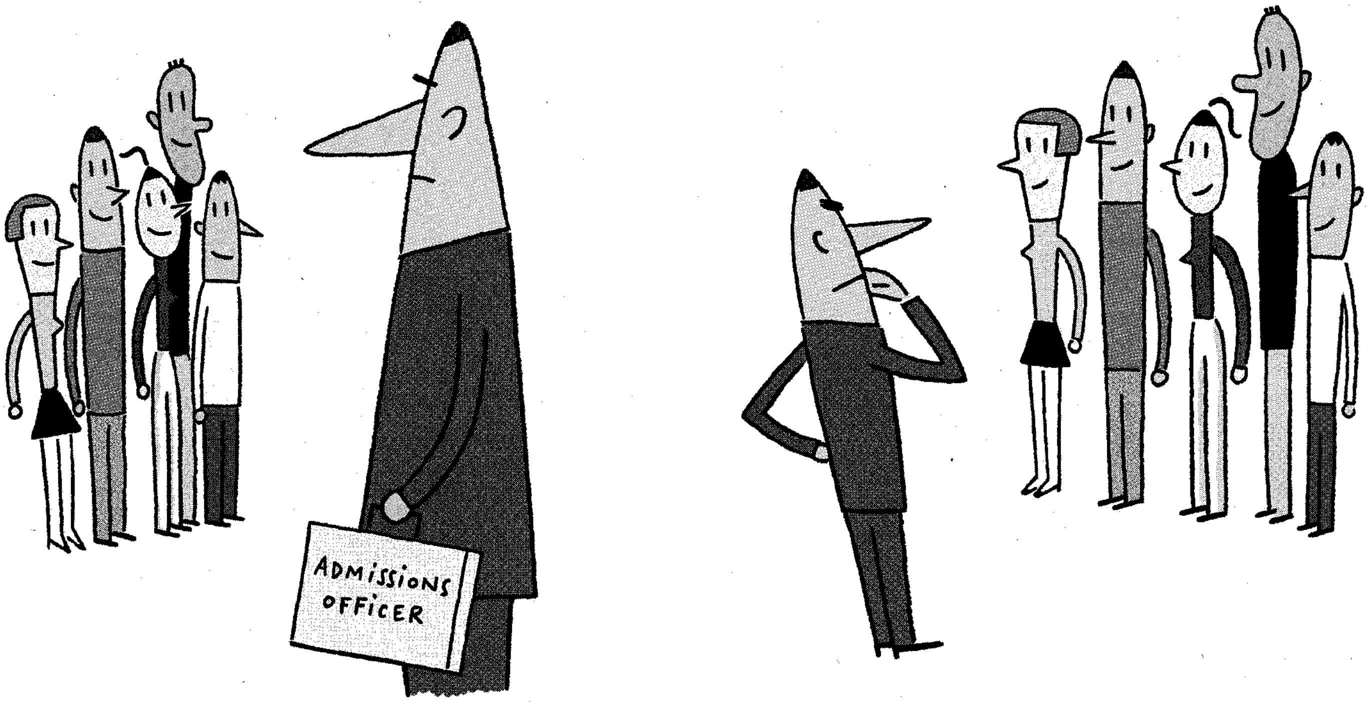
Why college admissions has become unpredictable.

BY LOUIS MENAND

In the spring semester of my senior year of high school, my father got a call from the headmaster of the school I was about to graduate from. The headmaster said that he was expecting to speak soon with the admissions office at the single Ivy League college to which, on the headmaster's advice, I had applied. He was wondering whether my father planned to attend a local cocktail-party fund-raiser for my school that Sunday. My father (rightly, in my opinion) hung up on him, and a few weeks later I received a rejection letter from the Ivy League college. This was my introduction to the meritocracy.

Apart from the tactlessness (made grotesque by the circumstance that I was a scholarship student), this little episode was not entirely anomalous. My headmaster was not gaming the system; the system was already a game. He ran what is known as a feeder school: for many years, its most favored students had been admitted to the Ivy League college to which I had applied. More qualified students applied than the college could accept, of course, which is why it continued to seek my headmaster's recommendations at the end of the admissions process. If the college could accommodate, say, six graduates (it was a small school), he could name them, and the college would not be disappointed. I expect that, as part of a tacit understanding, the best students were not encouraged to apply to the other Ivy League colleges, since most of them seemed, every year, to end up going to that one.

My headmaster assumed, therefore, that his school's reputation for getting students into this particular college was one reason parents paid to send their children there. Why he thought that he could squeeze a few more dollars from my family, which did not have the money to give, is something I've never understood; but, in the calculation of which high-school bodies get directed where, dollars are part of the equation. Headmasters of expensive prep schools are no longer given the degree of carte blanche they once enjoyed at college admissions offices (their powers were fading even in my time), but college admissions offices do have long-term "informal" relations with guidance counsellors at feeder schools. Colleges are sometimes told by counsellors which of two equally attractive applicants has wealthier parents, since that might increase the chances for a donation; or which applicant is less likely to qualify for financial aid; or which is more likely, if accepted, to enroll. These considerations may or may not figure in the final decision. It is a



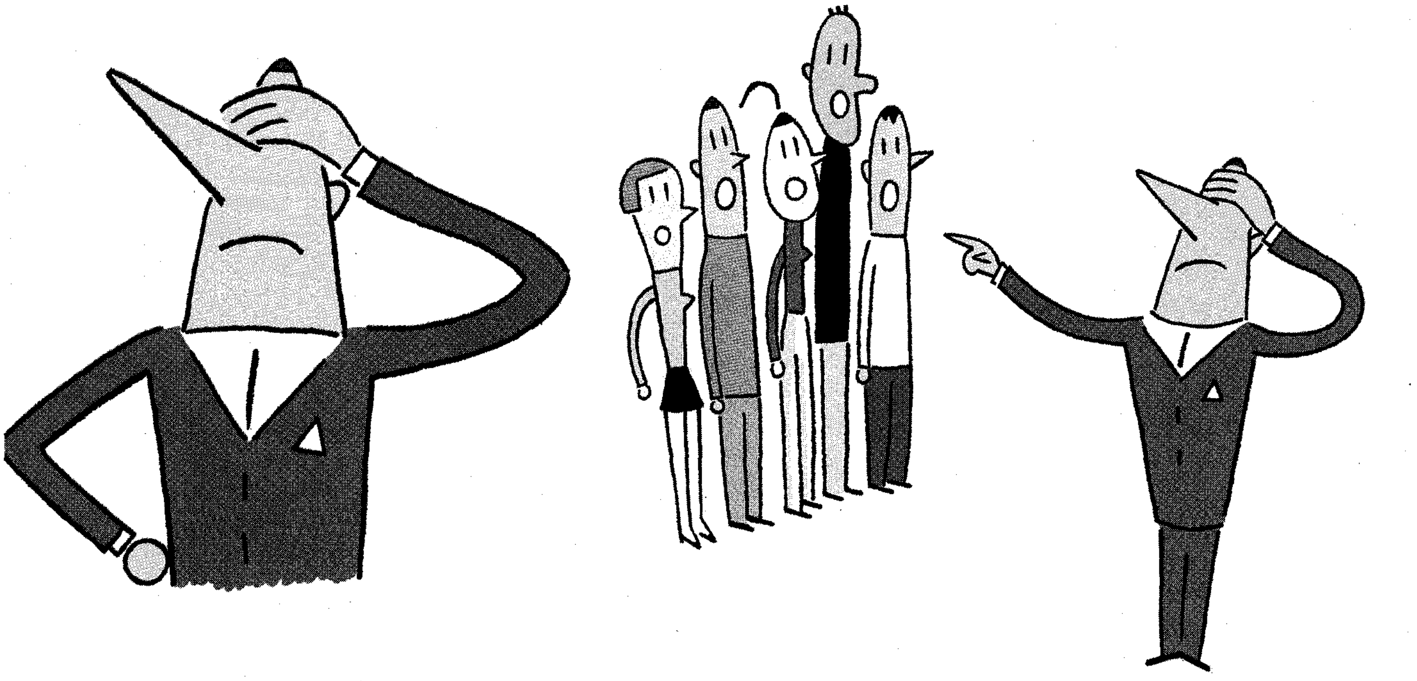
PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

The best colleges have so many well-qualified applicants to choose from that they can effectively cherry-pick their classes. How mistake, though, to imagine that they are never on the table.

In the ongoing debate about affirmative action, with the Supreme Court expecting to decide a case involving admissions procedures at the University of Michigan, the term "meritocracy" is a canard. American education is not meritocratic, and it never has been. Merit, defined as quantifiable aptitude and achievement, is just one of the variables that decide educational outcomes. Success in college admissions, as in almost every sphere of life, is a function of some combination of ability, connections, persistence, wealth, and special markers—that is, attributes valued for the difference they make to "the mix." Since 1978, the year of the Supreme Court decision in Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, race has been a judicially approved special marker in higher education. As Justice Lewis Powell pointed out in the majority opinion, quoting from the amici curiae brief filed jointly for Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, and Penn, college admissions offices have always given preference to various types of candidates whose grades and standardized-test scores may be below average. They have done so because they have other institutional needs besides putting scholars in the classrooms. They have football teams to field, orchestras and marching bands to staff, student organizations to be led, alumni to be kept in a giving mood, and feeder schools to be kept in a feeding mood. They have a gender balance to preserve. They can't have ten times as many poets as physicists, or thirty students from Exeter and none from the local high school. Racial diversity, Powell concluded, is just another institutional need. What the Bakke decision basically said to universities was: Stop talking about redressing the effects of past discrimination and start talking about the educational benefits of mixed-race student bodies, and you'll be on the safe side of the law. It preserved the practice by changing the rationale.

How admissions offices contrive to meet all these institutional needs—how they manage to enroll pre-meds, painters, children of alumni ("legacies"), soccer players, Exeter grads, and African-Americans in roughly the same proportions, year after year—while maintaining (or improving) the college's median S.A.T. score is a good story, and it's made better by the understandable reluctance of most colleges to speak frankly about the process. In 1999, Jacques Steinberg, a reporter at the *Times*, was permitted to observe the selection of the class of 2004 at Wesleyan. "The Gatekeepers: Inside the Admissions Process of a Premier College" (Viking; $25.95) is his account. In 2001, James Fallows published an influential article in *The Atlantic Monthly* on the use of early admissions (the system that allows students who apply early to receive a quick decision), which drew on work done by Christopher Avery, Andrew Fairbanks, and Richard Zeckhauser; their book, "The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite" (Harvard; $29.95), has just been published. "The Gatekeepers" is mostly case studies of a small number of Wesleyan applicants; "The Early Admissions Game" is mostly statistical analyses of admissions rates at élite colleges. Together, they will pretty much scare the daylights out of people with children approaching college age (not to mention the children themselves). They do not show the admissions process to be unfair or corrupt; it is not—although Avery and his co-writers think that it is less transparent than it should be. They do show it to be, as psychiatrists say, highly overdetermined, affected by so many variables that it has become, for most intents and purposes, unpredictable. Avery and his colleagues describe college admissions as a casino on Mars: you have to guess the rules of the game you are playing, and the rules can change while you are playing it.

There are many reasons that college admission has become so complex, but the main one is demand. In 1932, 1,330 people applied for admission to Yale. Seventy-two per cent—nine hun-



rive to enroll geniuses, legacies, athletes, and nonwhites in the same proportions every year is a good story.

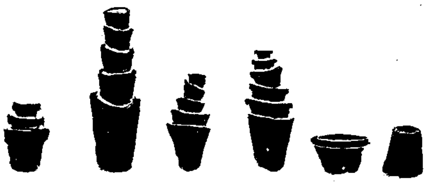
dred and fifty-nine—were accepted. Eight hundred and eighty-four students enrolled; twenty-seven per cent of them were the sons of Yale graduates. Last year, Yale had 15,466 applicants and accepted 2,009, or thirteen per cent. Thirteen hundred enrolled; sixteen per cent were legacies. In 1999-2000, the eight Ivy League colleges together received 121,948 applications and rejected more than eighty per cent. This means that colleges like Harvard and Yale can cherry-pick their classes. If Harvard needs an outside linebacker, it can probably choose between an All-Division player with 1450 combined S.A.T. scores and an All-State with 1350. Yale can choose between a legacy, a Latina, and a national-science-competition finalist, depending on which hole needs another pigeon, each applicant with two 800s on the S.A.T.s (a credential known as "dialling toll-free"). Ivy League colleges can reach very deep into their pools before they start coming up with underqualified applicants.

Most colleges cannot go so deep. There are more than two thousand four-year colleges in the United States. Only about two hundred reject more students than they accept. The vast majority of American colleges accept eighty per cent or more of those who apply. But among the top fifty there is a constant Darwinian struggle to improve selectivity. These colleges want two things from their admissions offices: a low acceptance rate and a high matriculation rate (that is, a high percentage of admits who actually enroll—the "yield"). Both these numbers—the acceptance rate and the yield—figure in *U.S. News and World Report's* annual rankings of American colleges.

The *U.S. News* rankings began in 1983, and they drive colleges nuts, because they are based on notoriously unstable and sometimes incomparable categories, but they have a demonstrated effect on both applications and donations. They can make a college "hot" overnight. The factors that, this year, make Pomona fifth among liberal-arts colleges (tied with Carleton) and Middlebury seventh (tied with Bowdoin)—things like class size, alumni donations, and faculty salaries—are so prone to change that the rankings can flip during the summer, so that next year Middlebury might be able to begin its fund-raising letter with the good news that it has leapfrogged from seventh to fifth in the national rankings, while Pomona's letter must boast of other things.

One of the colleges aggrieved by the *U.S. News* rankings is Cornell, which has several peculiarities that throw its numbers out of alignment with those of other Ivy League universities; it is cheaper to live in Ithaca than in Boston or New York, for example, so the average faculty salary is lower at Cornell, and this counts against it in the rankings. Ronald Ehrenberg, a Cornell economist frustrated with the rankings obsession, points out, in "Tuition Rising: Why College Costs So Much" (Harvard; $18.95), that the figures colleges send to *U.S. News* can, hypothetically, be massaged in any number of ways to yield a better ranking. If, for example, one alumna gives a million dollars and the rest of her class gives nothing, what *U.S. News* calls the "alumni giving rank" (total dollars) will be high, but the "alumni giving rate" (total participation) will be low. If you divide up the million dollars and send some to every member of the class, with the request that it be donated right back to Cornell, the rank will stay the same and the rate will shoot up to a hundred per cent. Similarly, the category "percentage of classes with fifty or more students" (the lower the percentage the better) leaves no room for a distinction between classes with sixty students and classes with six hundred. One class with six hundred will count much less against a college than ten classes with sixty.

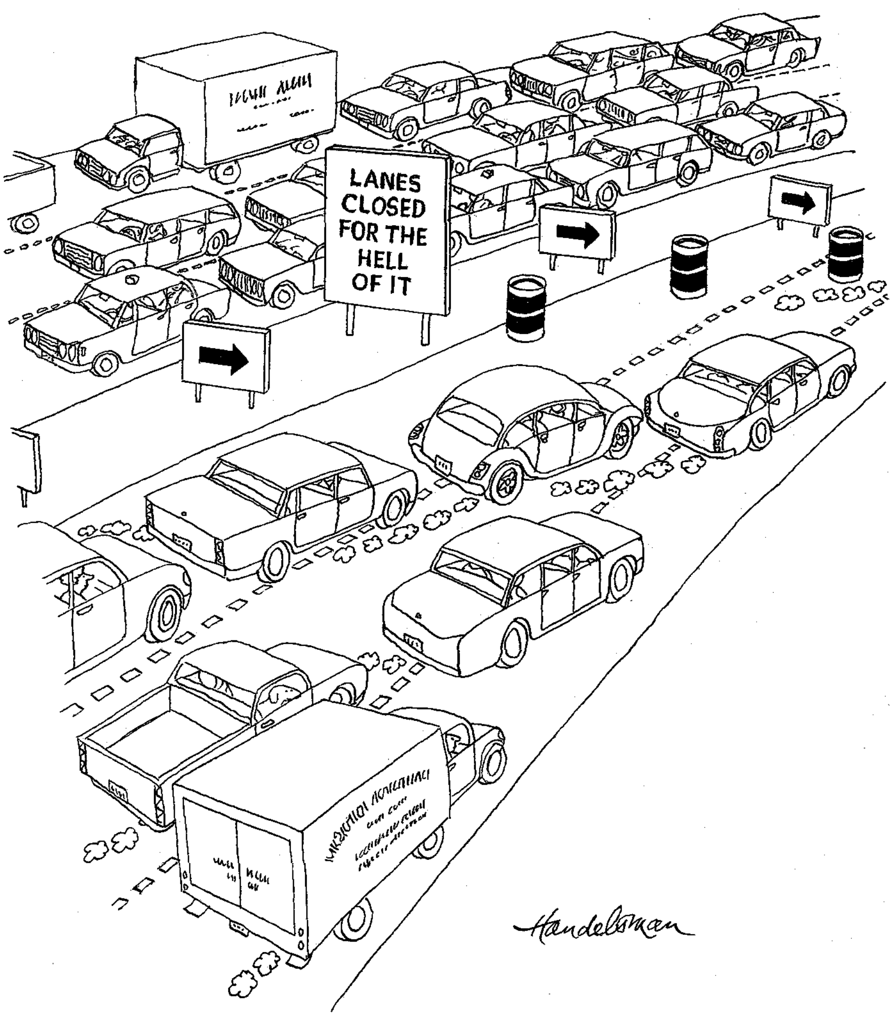
The effect of the ranking system on admissions has been that colleges encourage as many applications as possible, even from students who are unlikely to be accepted, since this increases selectivity, and they place a premium on accepting students who are very likely to enroll, since this increases the yield. This is one of the reasons, according to the authors of "The Early Admissions Game," that so many selective colleges have instituted early-admissions programs. There are two types. Early Action programs allow students to submit applications before the regular deadline with the promise of a quick decision—accept, reject, or defer. Accepted students are still free to apply elsewhere. Early Decision programs, though, are binding on the applicants. If they are accepted, they are honor-bound (there is no legal penalty) to withdraw their applications to other colleges. Around twenty-five per cent of American colleges offer one or the other program, and a few have both. Among the Ivies, Harvard offers Early Action; the rest offer Early Decision.



The chief finding reached by the authors of "The Early Admissions Game" is that applying early significantly increases the chances of acceptance. Their conclusions are based on data from the admissions offices at fourteen élite colleges and on a survey of three thousand high-school seniors. The average student in their sample who applied Early Action increased his or her chances of admission by 18.9 percentage points; an Early Decision application increased the chances of the average applicant in the sample by 34.8 points. The authors calculate that the advantage is the equivalent of a hundred additional points on the combined S.A.T. scores. An Early Decision application doubled the average applicant's chances at Brown and nearly tripled them at Princeton. An Early Action application nearly tripled the chances at Harvard. Half of all current Harvard students were early applicants; only ten per cent of the regular applicants to Harvard were accepted. This suggests that unless an applicant is what admissions officers call "hooked"—unless he or she is a legacy, a recruited athlete, or a "clear priority" (Wesleyan's label for nonwhite applicants)—the chances for acceptance in the regular pool are very reduced. As the college counsellor at the Collegiate School, in New York, told Avery and his co-authors, "If you're an 'unhooked' white male applying regular to Harvard or Princeton, might as well just stick a fork in you, because you're done."

Colleges argue that the early-admissions pool is stronger than the regular pool, and that this accounts for the higher acceptance rate, but the authors of "The Early Admissions Game" dispute that claim. They find that Early Decision applicants at Princeton are admitted at close to three times the rate of regular applicants (fifty-five per cent versus nineteen per cent), but have lower average S.A.T. scores. In general, they conclude that Early Action applicants are slightly stronger on average than regular applicants, but that Early Decision applicants are weaker. "The Early Admissions Game" is intended as an exposé, for high-school students and their parents, of the realities of college admissions, but it is also a protest against the practice of early admissions. The authors believe that these programs benefit privileged students, who are more likely to get informed guidance about how the "game" is played; that they cheat disadvantaged students who do use them, because with Early Decision the students have to accept whatever aid package they are awarded under the standard formula; and that they entice students to choose a college before they have intelligently explored their options.

So why do colleges do it? There are several theories, not all compatible but probably all relevant in one way or another. Early Decision programs obviously enhance the yield, since the ratio of admits to matricks in those programs is close to one. For some colleges, early admissions is a way of plucking a candidate from the pools of higher-ranked colleges. The comfort of knowing in January that you have been accepted by Wesleyan may outweigh the attractions of Yale, where the slope is somewhat steeper. But there are other considerations at work. For one thing, colleges do not always accept their strongest applicants. A shoo-in at Yale—an applicant who, in admissions talk, can "walk on water"—may be rejected at Wesleyan, on the theory that she will just be lowering the yield when she turns Wesleyan down to go to Yale. Admissions officers are wary of what they call "scalp-hunters," hot shots out to rack up acceptances. When they spot them, they mail them the thin envelope. Early Decision programs guarantee the commitment of the stellar applicant—which is one reason their admission rate is so high. At the same time, a college can defer an Early Action applicant, if it thinks it is being used as a backup, and still have a chance to get him or her in the regular pool. Early admissions gives colleges more control over the process.


LANES CLOSED FOR THE HELL OF IT
Handelsman

As Avery and his co-authors point out, though, early-admissions applicants are not necessarily stronger than regular applicants, and this points to another theory, which is that colleges use early admissions, particularly Early Decision, to select not the best students in the class but the weakest. There will be a bottom tier in every class, and early admissions is a way of handpicking it, making sure of getting students who really want to attend, and who satisfy one or another institutional need as well. It is also a way of taking care of the athletes and the legacies and the "clear priorities" right at the start. Knowing in January the makeup of a third of the incoming class gives admissions committees greater flexibility down the road. A lot of poets in the early round makes it easier to pick the physicist later on (and is bad news for the poet who applies late). A high median S.A.T. in the group accepted by January—something that is more likely in the case of a college with Early Action admissions—opens the door for the president's godson, whose hitherto undiagnosed allergy to No. 2 pencils probably explains his unusual test scores.

Finally, Avery and his colleagues think that there is a dollars issue. All the Ivies now have needs-blind admissions. Because candidates for early admission are more likely to be from affluent schools with well-informed guidance counsellors, they are also more likely to be "full pay" students. The odds are, therefore, that the more students a college takes in the early round, the less financial aid it is going to have to shell out in the end. And, as "The Early Admissions Game" points out, Early Decision prevents students who do need aid from using another offer to negotiate a better deal. They are not allowed to get another offer.

Is early admissions unfair, though? One of the effects of the increase in demand from the days when headmasters could chauffeur their preferred students into élite colleges is a shift in emphasis from what some admissions officers refer to as B.W.R.K.s—bright well-rounded kids—to what are known as "well-lopsided" students. It's no longer the students who are well-rounded, in other words; it's the class. This is why an applicant's special markers matter so much: differentiation is what colleges are looking for. Harvard rejects twenty-five per cent of its "toll free" candidates. It is not looking for the perfect student; it is looking for the perfect class. In effect, the admissions office has a dozen mini-quotas to fill. If it waits until March, it is leaving a lot to chance. But increasing the predictability for the college is precisely what reduces the predictability for the applicant. Applicants have no idea which niche they are competing for, and at each college it's likely to be a different niche, anyway.

Most people feel that a heterogeneous class is better than a homogeneous one, and the fact that this makes it harder to get in does not mean that the process is unjust. It's just a supply-side system: excess demand gives the colleges the advantage in deciding what they want their student demographics to look like. And the truth is that anything that reduces the power of the S.A.T. is a good thing. It is absurd to believe that a test taken when a person is sixteen can predict how well that person will be performing when she is twenty-two. In fact, S.A.T. scores claim to predict academic performance only for the first year of college, and, even then, they explain less of the variation in grades than does high-school class rank or parents' education. They have little correlation with performance in the last two years, which is when students start to specialize. There seems to be a developmental jump that people make when they are nineteen or twenty which can render past measures of merit irrelevant. When you're suddenly publishing your stuff in *Poetry*, that 500 on the math S.A.T. seems pretty insignificant.

Still, the process can go haywire in interesting ways. Steinberg's book, on admissions at Wesleyan, makes it clear that a personal relationship with the school college counsellor and, either through the counsellor or directly, with an officer on the college's admissions committee can make a big difference for what might be called the average exceptional student, the applicant who is fully qualified, and even well-lopsided, but who happens not to walk on water. There are moments when the counsellor or the admissions officer can administer a crucial nudge to the application of a student he or she has a personal interest in. But then comes the one moment when the applicant has control: the moment he or she gets to decide whether to accept the acceptance.

At this point, a variable that is generally masked, or cosmetically altered, during the courtship ritual of admissions suddenly comes into play. This is the nature of college life itself. As Steinberg shows, admissions officers are not usually academics themselves. Their backgrounds tend to be in service work: they are people who have devoted their lives to helping people. Cornell is one of the few colleges where faculty play a regular role in admissions. At Wesleyan, the previous occupations of members of the admissions committee included (in 1999-2000) food-stamp interviewer, resident administrator in a psychiatric halfway house, high-school English teacher, and management trainee at Sears. Admissions officers therefore tend to be highly interested in, and experienced judges of, character. At the same time, they may be a step removed from the realities of campus life. Their ideas about college can be a little purer than the situation merits.

One of the applicants Steinberg chose to track through the admissions process was Becca, a student at Harvard-Westlake, which is an élite private school near Los Angeles. Becca had been involved in a small scandal at Harvard-Westlake. On the way to class one day, she took a bite of a pot brownie another student was handing around. The student was caught (she had become ill), and Becca turned herself in. She was the only one of the several students who had eaten a piece of the brownie who did so, and though she was disciplined, she was also praised by the school administration for her integrity and maturity. The following year, she was elected president of the student government, and she became the chair of the honor board.

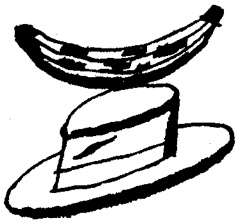
Becca and her college counsellor debated about what to do with this incident when she applied to college; they decided to make it a selling point, as a story about accepting responsibility and rising above past mistakes. Becca used the pot-brownie story as the subject of her application essay, and was turned down by all the top colleges to which she applied. At Wesleyan, the committee could not see the wisdom of admitting a student who had confessed to using drugs. The Wesleyan admissions officer whose district included Harvard-Westlake, though, believed the accept-responsibility-and-rise-above-past-mistakes line, and he contrived to get Becca onto the waiting list and then, surreptitiously, to the top of that list. A visit to Wesleyan was arranged for her. When she arrived, a student escort took her to the dorm where she would be staying. As soon as she entered the building, Becca could smell marijuana everywhere. Her visit turned out to coincide with what is known at Wesleyan as Zonker Harris Day, a day devoted to the celebration of pot smoking. Becca was later accepted at Wesleyan, but she was also accepted off the waiting list at Cornell. She went to Cornell.

One of Becca's classmates at Harvard-Westlake was among the most heavily recruited high-school students in the country in 1999-2000. Her name was Julianna. She had missed only one question on her P.S.A.T.s, she was an accomplished dancer, and her father was black and Brazilian. She was wooed by dozens of colleges, and was accepted everywhere she applied, including Stanford, Texas, Chicago, Michigan, Swarthmore, Harvard, Wesleyan, and Yale. Wesleyan had been courting Julianna for several years, and believed that it had a chance to get her. A visit was arranged. Again, a student escort showed up to take her around. The escort asked whether she would like to attend a meeting of a student club. Julianna said she would, and soon found herself sitting in a conference room with a dozen other students. One of them opened a bag and took out a collection of vibrators and other sex toys. It was a meeting of the Wesleyan University Cunt Club. Julianna went to Yale. It was a good thing for Yale, probably, that she did not visit the campus during the seven days of lectures, films, panels, concerts, and parties known as Campus-Wide Sex Week. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Good Faith, *by Jane Smiley (Knopf; $26).* Everyone trusts Joe Stratford, the affable Pennsylvania real-estate agent who narrates Smiley's ninth novel—his clients, his bankers, his boss, his boss's sexy married daughter, and even the irascible contractor who builds the most beautiful houses in the county. But when Marcus Burns, a charismatic I.R.S. agent turned developer, comes to town, Joe feels that no one else understands his potential the way Marcus does. With Joe as his partner, Marcus soon seduces half the county into investing in a development venture that he says will make everyone rich. It is hard to imagine a novelist better suited to taking on the S. & L. scandals of the nineteen-eighties than Smiley, who has proved herself capable of writing about corruption in wildly different stylistic and moral registers ("A Thousand Acres," "Moo"). Yet Joe's sense of who he has become is oddly muffled, a quality that infects the novel as a whole—as if the author were unable to decide what, finally, her characters are guilty of, or how hard they deserve to fall.

I'm Not Scared, *by Niccolò Ammaniti, translated from the Italian by Jonathan Hunt (Canongate; $23).* Ammaniti is one of Italy's most acclaimed younger writers, and this carefully constructed thriller is the first of his books to appear here. During a piercingly hot summer, a few kilometres from a bone-dry hamlet in rural Tuscany, a shy, nervy, nine-year-old boy called Michele explores a derelict house and discovers, under moldering leaves, a horrifying secret. The novel is saved from sensationalism by Ammaniti's almost cinematic ability to conjure detail—the look of scraps of meat on a plate, the sheen of a new bike, the whispers of adults in the night—and by his utterly convincing re-creation of a child's perspective, as Michele's discovery propels him into ever more uncertain territory.



Producer, *by David L. Wolper, with David Fisher (Scribner; $30).* In both good ways and bad, Wolper's book is a perfect specimen of the mogul memoir. The television pioneer responsible for such classics as "Roots," "The Thorn Birds," and "Welcome Back, Kotter," Wolper writes with a ghostwriter, who seems to have barely refurbished the dictated text. Amid the unfiltered egotism—the credit-taking and self-puffery—are unexpected finds, as when Wolper suddenly gossips about an illegitimate son of Elvis Presley or offers a shrewd assessment of the power of the early networks. While he dismisses ex-wives and families in a single sentence, Wolper finds time to tell us about the most well-endowed animal in the world (the water rhinoceros). Regrettably, the story lacks the campy excess of, say, Robert Evans's "The Kid Stays in the Picture": Wolper's tepid, fame-gilded life—he made a lot of money, not a lot of enemies—just isn't the stuff of high entertainment.

Polaroids, *by Carlo Mollino (Arena; $55).* One of the most dashing figures of mid-century Italy, Mollino was renowned both for his sleek, ultramodern furniture design and architecture and for his refined hedonism; he was a drug addict who raced cars and flew his own plane. Sometime around 1960, Mollino began to seek out women, mostly prostitutes, in his native Turin, bringing them to his villa for late-night modelling sessions, where they posed for Polaroid photographs, against backgrounds that he designed. The pictures remained a secret between Mollino and his subjects until after his death, in 1973, when some two thousand were found. This lavish selection of several hundred Polaroids preserves the essential mystery of a project both decadent and hermetic. Though clearly the product of a deep obsession, the photographs are deliberately impersonal, each baroque detail an invitation for the viewer to imagine Mollino's encounters with the women.

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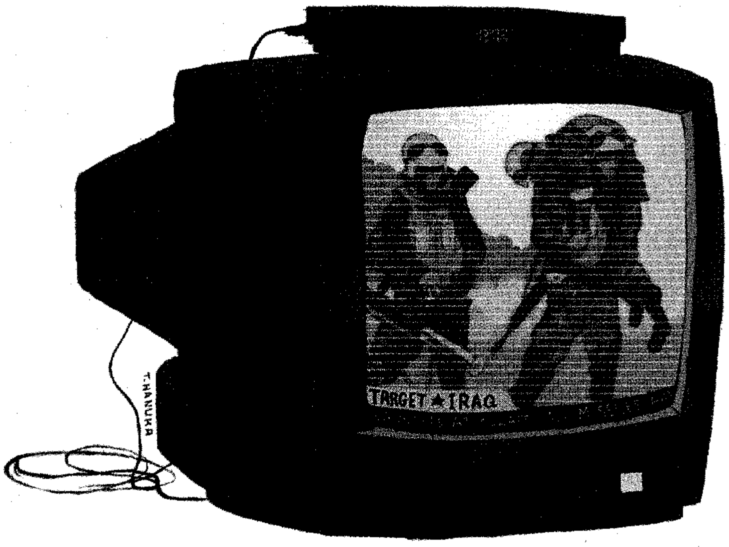
ON TELEVISION

NEWS UNDER FIRE

Real-time reporting in the fog of war.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

Last week, as the war in Iraq became more complicated and confusing militarily—if not for the Americans who were running it, then certainly for the Americans who were trying to follow it on television—it also became harder for the news channels to provide accurate information. Their crisp, minute-by-minute triumphs of communication in the first few days of the war began to look, in retrospect, like videotape from a Boy Scout field trip, when everyone is still in the driveway loading up the minivan. The war suddenly seemed not like something you could comprehend by stitching together its broadcast pieces but like something that had been dropped on a hard floor and shattered: you just sat there staring at the shards, the task of putting them back together too overwhelming. We had secured Basra. No, wait a minute—no, we hadn't. Hundreds of Republican Guard troops were heading south from Baghdad—no, wait a sec, they may not be the Republican Guard, and there aren't that many of them. Or are there? Coalition forces are being greeted with open arms—Look! They're waving at us. Hold it, hold it—now they're shooting at us. News from Iraq began to change so much in the course of a day that the cable news networks' rapid-fire reporting—taking note of every development, including the false ones—started to work against them, as they then had to backpedal and correct themselves. You got more solid information by turning on the TV once or twice a day (or by, ahem, reading the newspaper) than you did by keeping it on.



The cable news networks resorted to old-fashioned iconography.

TOMER HANUKA

For a few days, there wasn't much to see, anyway; the war hadn't exactly ground to a halt, but things had got muddier, dirtier, foggier, dustier, windier, and slower, thanks to the violent sandstorms and thunderstorms that covered large parts of Iraq not long after the big "shock and awe" bombing of Baghdad. New colors were added to our wartime TV palette: in addition to nightscope green, there was now bilious yellow and apocalyptic orange blanketing our screens, making it impossible to distinguish between earth and sky, except when the occasional ghostly tank or miserable human figure moved in the background behind the miserable reporter. David Bloom, of NBC, stood before the camera in Karbala last Tuesday, a couple of hours before sunset, wearing goggles in the gloom and holding light sticks. (The next day, in a perfect example of the kind of tongue twister that anchors honoring the press restrictions are prone to, MSNBC's Keith Olbermann asked Bloom what the troops he was embedded with thought might happen next, now that the sandstorm in their area had cleared up. "Obviously, I wouldn't ask you to tell me what they tell you about what they think is up next," he said.)

The one color missing, for the most part, from the first week of television coverage was red, the primary color of war. By the weekend before last, deaths of all kinds, all of them awful, had occurred—death by accident, death by friendly fire, death by ambush, death of American prisoners of war, possibly by execution at the hands of Iraqis, and civilian death caused by coalition forces. There was also the freakish incident in Kuwait, when a soldier turned on his comrades, throwing grenades and shooting into command tents, killing two people. But little blood was shown on TV until last Wednesday, when an explosion of unknown provenance occurred in a residential area of Baghdad, killing at least fifteen people. Showing bloody bodies, in some instances, might violate the rules of engagement for embedded journalists, who, to avoid appearing exploitative, would want not merely to display them but to give explanatory information—which, in turn, could conceivably jeopardize an ongoing operation. Blood is not exactly beside the point, but it isn't exactly the point, either: if you're watching live coverage of coalition soldiers on their bellies in the open, firing on Iraqis inside a building until they stop firing back, and you don't realize that people are being killed before your eyes, whether you can see them or not, it could be argued that you're doing the sanitizing yourself. On the other hand, it's odd to hear the anchor of CNN say, as Aaron Brown did early in the war, that the network is going to be very conservative in what it shows "if combat breaks out." (*If*?) Airing the gruesome facts of war—"that's not the business we're in," he said, in his characteristic Sleepytime-tea tones.

The images are around, if you need to see them, and even if you don't—there is no such thing as a fleeting image anymore. The mother of one of the American P.O.W.s, who subscribes to a Filipino channel that uses footage from Al Jazeera, found out about her son's capture before military authorities had contacted her. And, in addition to being a living-room war, to use Michael J. Arlen's phrase, this is also a desktop war, being fought, and fought against, by e-mail and on the Internet. (I saw pictures of the dead P.O.W.s on the Drudge Report site.) Of course, the Web, like TV, can be idiotic as well as useful. The New Jersey restaurateur who flushed a thousand dollars' worth of Dom Perignon down the toilet a couple of weeks ago will be glad to know about the Buy American Web site mentioned in a Fox News segment last week, which features a "French Boycott Shopping List," suggesting that you buy Revlon makeup instead of L'Oréal, and Goodyear tires instead of Michelin.

The cable news networks' ratings have shot up many hundreds of points as a result of the war, and, even with the sand blowing in their eyes and the war not going as well as they and the White House had led us to believe it would, they weren't about to let go of the adrenaline rush that they had helped fuel. (With banners such as "Showdown: Iraq" and "Target: Iraq," they had all but said, "Iraq, Here We Come!," and, when President Bush announced that Saddam Hussein had forty-eight hours to get out of town, MSNBC even put a countdown clock on the screen, which ticked off the minutes till kickoff time.) None of them used the weather delay to do any in-depth stories on the history of Iraq or of other countries' relations with Iraq, or to discuss the various factions in the country—the Kurds, the Shiite and Sunni Muslims. Instead, they began to hedge their bets on the war, focussing on "the mood of America" and on heartrending stories of service and sacrifice. Of course, you can't do a story on the mood of America without showing a TV, so CNN showed a picture of a TV tuned to CNN, with Wolf Blitzer broadcasting from Kuwait City. The network, trying to keep its momentum going, also did a little sleight of hand, calling large parts of its coverage "Live from the Front Lines" (the words crawl on the screen above the news crawl), even when it was showing tape of the President talking in Florida or a weather report from a Stateside studio. More and more, the cable news channels, temporarily deprived of coherent moving pictures, resorted to using the old-fashioned iconography of still pictures to convey—and to glorify—war, even as they scurried to "report" that the President was under increasing pressure to respond to Americans' expectations, and that Vice-President Cheney's assertion, on "Meet the Press" two weeks ago, that the regular Iraqi Army wouldn't put up much of a fight and that even the Republican Guard was "likely to step aside" had proved wrong. As they cut to commercials, they showed photographs of a soldier saying goodbye to his teary young daughter, a soldier standing guard with a gigantic gun, a soldier carrying a fallen comrade over his shoulders, a soldier handing food to an Iraqi boy, and a woman tying a yellow ribbon around a tree. (The *Times* has been more straightforward in facing battlefield facts: a picture of a dead Iraqi soldier appeared on the front page last Thursday.) MSNBC is engaged in what might be called Operation Pulled Heartstrings, playing an ad for itself that has the words "May God Bless America" on the screen, followed by images of American forces, and then the words "Far from Home . . . Close to Our Hearts"; and in its studio the network has put up a wall of photographs of soldiers, sent in by family members, called "America's Bravest." Every so often, a woman will add a picture and tell us a little something about its subject. (For the most part, the pictures are of men; and people on TV have lately taken to referring, as they did in the past, to the mothers, fathers, children, and wives the soldiers have left behind, somehow forgetting that, these days, there are thousands of husbands waiting at home as well.)

The reporters in the field are doing the best they can, and they deserve credit for trying to keep us informed under incredibly difficult and dangerous conditions. (And let's hear it for their mostly unsung cameramen.) But, back here at home, it's amateur hour too much of the time: when you hear a young CNN reporter ask the father of a P.O.W. to describe the soldier's "relationship with his children"—who are two years old and five months old—and then ask him, "Is it, like, you're going to be sitting by the phone?," you are, like, glad that there are still people over fifty in the news business, who have some gravity and a grasp of grammar.

The cable news networks are running hard to stay on top of the news—they offer "up-to-the-minute coverage" and "military minutes"; Fox News pantingly covers global events with "our trip around the world in eighty seconds." (One of Fox News' military experts, by the way, a retired three-star general named Tom McInerney, offered this helpful bit of analysis twenty minutes into the March 21st bombing of Baghdad: "I hope our friend Kim Jong Il is looking at this.") But the instant images we've been getting have both compressed and extended time—once we see things as they are happening, we expect, impatiently, to keep on seeing things, and the intervals when there's no action now seem endless (especially since they're generally not filled with information, or, to use a term I heard during a military briefing, "fact-based information"). Last Tuesday, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted how time has been weirdly bent and stretched by the coverage of the war. "It does . . . leave people with the impression that it's been going on for days and weeks and months," he said. "It was one o'clock Friday that the air war began. It even seems like weeks to me."

Still, all this vaunted technology, this real-time reporting—has it really changed the way in which television brings war home? Michael Arlen, writing about Vietnam thirty-seven years ago, could have been writing about Iraq today: "The cumulative effect of all these three- and five-minute film clips, with their almost unvarying implicit deference to the importance of purely military solutions . . . and with their catering (in part unavoidably) to a popular democracy's insistent desire to view even as unbelievably complicated a war as this one in emotional terms (our guys against their guys), is surely wide of the mark, and is bound to provide these millions of people with an excessively simple, emotional, and military-oriented view of what is, at best, a mighty unsimple situation." ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

CREDIBLE HULKS

"The Good Thief" and "The Man Without a Past."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The movie I would most like to see this year is never going to happen. I have neither a title nor a plot; all I know is that it should star only those actors who have recently been in trouble with the law. What a lineup: Nick Nolte, Robert Downey, Jr., and Winona Ryder. A couple more and we could have an identity parade. The resulting film would have a certain cachet for scandal connoisseurs, but that is not the point. What interests me is not the details of the gossip that enfolds these performers but the manner in which their weakness—their natural sway toward tribulation—feeds into their work onscreen. Remember the photograph of Nolte that was made public after his D.U.I. arrest: the solar flare of sweaty hair, the flesh of his face lopsided with bewilderment. It is the only Hollywood still of the last twenty years that would have caught the eye of Goya, and it functions, by coincidence, as a perfect trailer for Nolte's latest movie, "The Good Thief."

Nolte plays a man called Bob, a chronic gambler and ex-thief residing in Nice. He claims to be the product of a French mother and an American father, although whether even Bob believes his own tales, like the one about meeting Picasso at a bullfight and coming away with a painting, is one of the hesitant questions in which this movie deals. Bob has seen better days, not to mention more triumphant nights. Before the opening sequence is through, he has lost at cards, shot up with heroin, joined a fight, stolen a passport, and met a girl.

The girl is an Eastern European named Anne (Nutsa Kukhianidze), with a black eye and a voice that sounds stoned even when she isn't. "What brought you here?" he asks. "The mayonnaise," she says, chomping on a French fry. He becomes her protector, though never her bedfellow, and she twines her reedy presence around him as he stumbles through the thicket of the plot. Having kicked the drugs and lost the dregs of his wallet on the horses, he returns, by way of compensation, to a life of crime, planning with a group of shady companions to lift an art collection from the owners of a Monte Carlo casino. His alibi for the night could not be neater. While his sidekicks drill into the safe room, he will be at the tables, with Anne on his arm, both of them robed in the finery of the rich.

The movie was written and directed by Neil Jordan, who, as we have seen in works as different as "Interview with the Vampire" and the laughless comedy "We're No Angels," likes to try his luck at any game that's going. This time, he has chosen the moody heist flick, and devotees of French noir will have gathered that "The Good Thief" is a remake of Jean-Pierre Melville's "Bob le Flambeur," made in 1955. Much of the original has been melted down and recast, beginning with Bob himself—in Melville's eyes a dapper figure, who could stay up all night and still, in an unforgiving dawn, resemble a retired bank clerk.

Then there is the location: the clouded grays of fifties Paris have been heated up into the multicolored chaos of Nice. Following the lead of Jonathan Demme's "The Truth About Charlie," Jordan is eager to introduce Americans to the volatile pleasures of the new France. The trouble is that, in both cases, the directors' benign desire to poke into the corners of a scrappy society causes them not just to lose control of the story but to forget that there is a story worth

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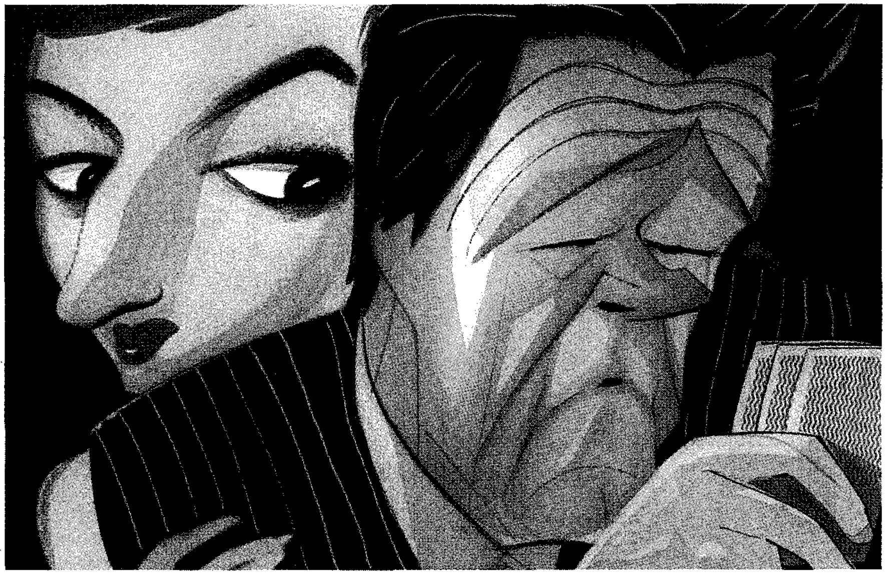
worrying about. The central hour of "The Good Thief" is a mess, as we are tugged halfheartedly into the fates of a heroin dealer, an art dealer (a slimy cameo by Ralph Fiennes), Anne's prospective pimp, a pair of identical Irish twins, a shaggy techno-wonk who provides the inside knowledge for the job, and a detective, Roger (Tchéky Karyo), who is at once Bob's nemesis and his soulmate. That last conceit is unalloyed Melville; anybody who is familiar with "Bob le Flambeur" and "Le Samouraï," or, better yet, who saw the ravishing reissue of "Le Cercle Rouge" at Film Forum earlier this year, will know that, once you enter the dour and trench-coated landscape of those films, the line between cop and robber becomes one of the most open borders in the world.


Nick Nolte and Nutsa Kukhianidze in Neil Jordan's new movie.

ERIC PALMA

Such fellow-feeling is honored in the closing scenes of Jordan's film, when Roger walks into the casino and throws an arm over Bob's shoulder, as if to say, I don't trust you, but I love you. For once, the cards have fallen graciously for Bob, and I wish that Jordan had made less room for Bob the junkie and more for Bob the gambler—*le flambeur*. I have no idea whether Nolte gambles, although I would be sorry to learn that he didn't. The clatter of illusion and grievance, the casual betrayals of the table and the track, bring out the best in an actor who seems to know all about the worst. The obvious comparison is with Robert Mitchum, but Mitchum had a carved and monumental look, plus a laconic slide to his voice, whereas Nolte is a magnificent heap, and you suspect, hearing the grainy bark of his line readings, that speech has to be dragged out of him against his will. "The Good Thief" is too spindly and unconfident for an actor of this bulk, yet without him it would curl up and die. One cannot hope to adapt Melville without a sturdy conviction that heroes exist to be doomed, and right now Nolte may be the only American star with the nerve, and the need, to go along with that plan. If actors did time for stealing movies, he would never be out of jail.

The new Aki Kaurismäki film, "The Man Without a Past," is no weirder than his previous efforts. Indeed, compared with "Leningrad Cowboys Go America," this venture tells an alarmingly straight tale. An unidentified man (Markku Peltola) arrives in Helsinki on a train. Soon afterward, he is mugged, robbed, and left for dead. Swathed in bandages, like a hipster Boris Karloff, he discharges himself from hospital and begins life again, in the lees of society, with no name, no job, no cash, and half a memory. He has relinquished all, and yet he seems far from dissatisfied. To be honest, he nudges closer to happiness than any other character in the movie, and his plight, whether viewed as a Christian parable or as a daydream of existential freedom, turns into something of a privilege.

What with Nolte and now Peltola, this is certainly a good week for ungarrulous wrecks. When the latter is offered soup and a bed by a family of outcasts, he takes a while to break the silence. "So you can talk, then?" the wife asks. "Sure," he replies. "I just didn't have anything to say before." With a dark forelock falling over his wide, bony features, Peltola could be Liam Neeson's long-lost Nordic cousin, and he's morose and bearish enough to ward off pathos. Watch him enter a café, order a cup of free hot water, then slowly extract a dry, much used tea bag from a matchbox, ready for re-dunking. Chaplin would have transformed the deed into a miniature ballet of self-pity, whereas Peltola's air of resigned practicality reminds you that Kaurismäki prefers to stake his comedy in the glacial and the glum. I was never wholly convinced by his earlier pictures, which visibly ached and creaked with the need to stay cool; lately, though, he seems to have come around to the idea that you can stir and touch an audience head on, without the nudge of irony, and the romance that buds between our hero and Irma (Kati Outinen), a severe blonde from the Salvation Army, is less a pastiche of passion than the real thing.

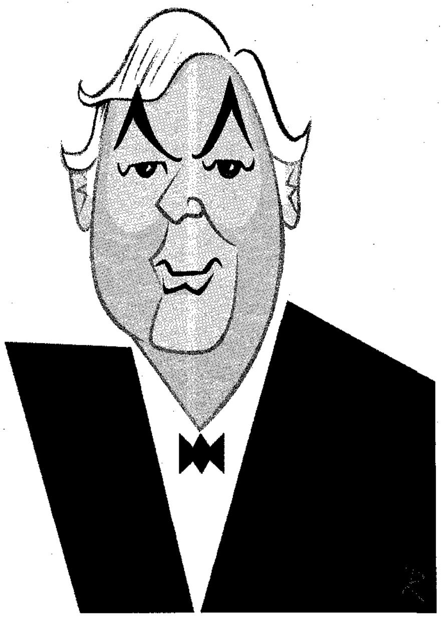
The movie was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards. It didn't win, although you could argue that a vote for Kaurismäki would have struck the desired chord of hopefulness and peace. His film may well have been the most beautiful on view in any category. What other director, filming in the calm light of early morning and evening, could rivet our attention to the yellow striations of particular clouds, or to the patch of blue paint on the wall of the abandoned storage container that becomes a home to the homeless? Also, if Kaurismäki had won the Oscar, he could have taken the opportunity to repeat his enchanting invitation of last year, at the time of the New York Film Festival, when he asked Donald Rumsfeld, in the interests of tranquillity, to go into the woods with him and gather mushrooms. It is an image that, once conjured up, is strangely hard to dispel: the filmmaker and the Secretary of Defense, hand in hand, each with a little basket, shyly picking their way among the fungi. ♦

POSTSCRIPT BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN

"If my head were sticking on a pike at the South West Gate to the White House grounds the impression would hardly be greater," Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who, through decades of prodigious output, seems never to have produced a dull or undramatic sentence, wrote to a friend in 1965. At the time, Senator Moynihan, who died last week, was being pilloried by the left. A minor collateral effect of the war in Iraq is that it has put the word "neoconservative" into general circulation, but there were neocons long before there was this war. Moynihan was one of the first, back in the days when most of them were new to conservatism, and were Democrats, and were primarily concerned with domestic rather than foreign affairs. Neoconservatism then was the party of tough-minded, skeptical realism, the political home of the emperor-has-no-clothes boys watching the parade of liberal progress. Moynihan was the movement's star and a leader of its entrance into the realm of foreign affairs. His oppositional turn, in the mid-seventies, as United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and, in particular, his vote against the infamous U.N. resolution equating Zionism with racism, embodied the neocons' suspicion of international organizations (which exceeded Moynihan's suspicion of them), and propelled him into a successful race for the Senate from New York in 1976. He became the only neocon ever to transcend the advisory role in government and attain high elective office.

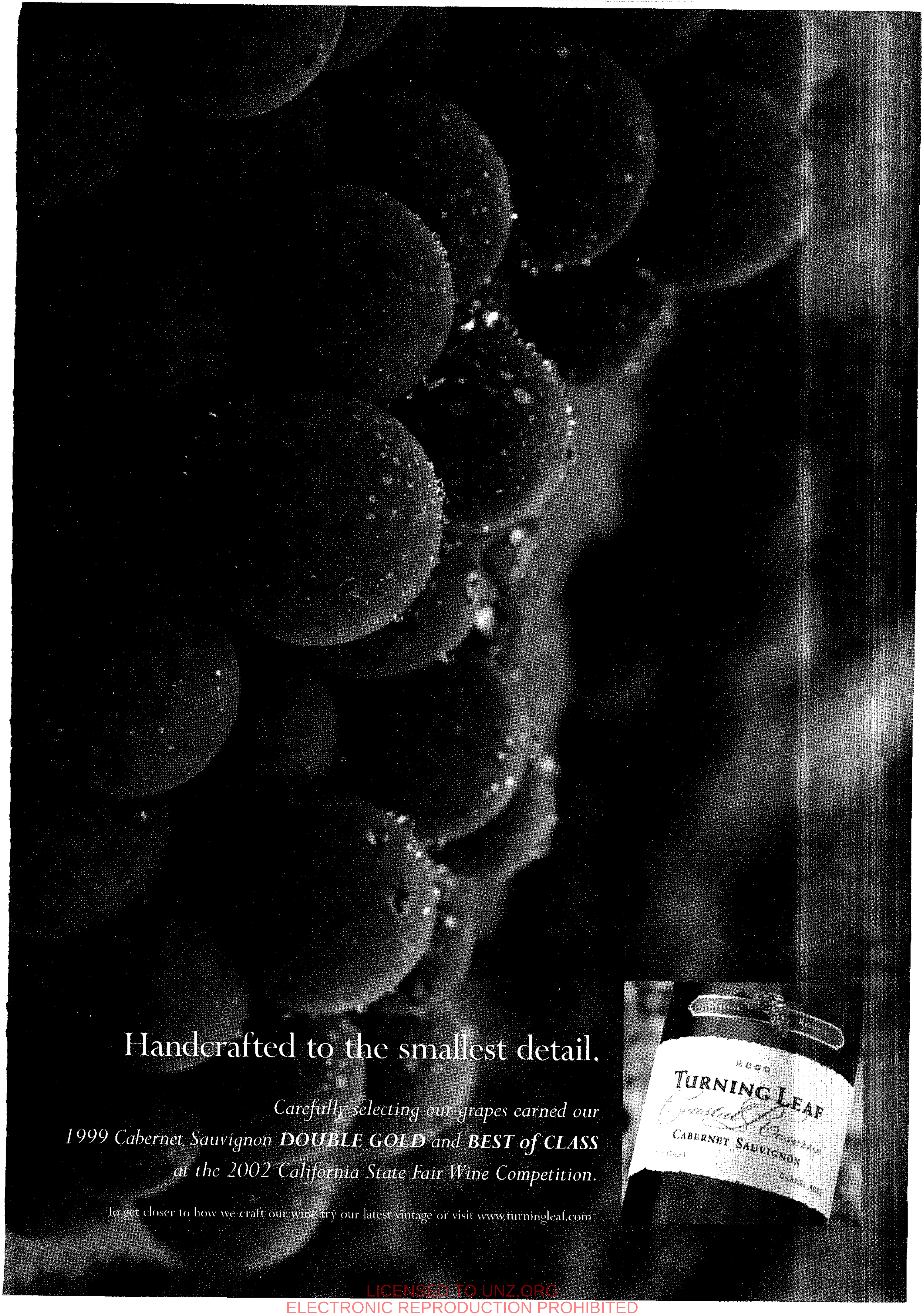
Moynihan expertly made himself into a central-casting version of a professor, in tweeds and bow tie. In Washington, people thought of him as the archetypal academic-in-government; the word "scholarly" appeared often in the obituaries. Although he was indeed a professor, this gets him slightly wrong. He was an intellectual, a manufacturer and purveyor of ideas—arresting ones that usually took the form of warnings of coming disaster. Moynihan was deeply conservative in his pessimism about the chances of the human project working out, especially in the social-order department, and was deeply liberal in his conviction that a large central government was probably the institution most likely to function effectively as a bulwark against the ever-pressing forces of chaos. He never really produced a magnum opus; the heart of his œuvre is a series of extended essays—several of which appeared in *The New Yorker*—in which he took in the slogging scholarly work of others, ran it through some sort of internal converter, and released it, transformed, as big, attention-grabbing, historically contextualized, elegantly expressed assertions. Probably the best known of these was the 1965 report called "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." People in government and politics often suspected Moynihan of aspiring more to credit for a fresh observation than to an actual effect on policy; in this case, as an Assistant Secretary of Labor, he produced a government report meant to be sensational and was hurt when the sensation it created was one of African-American resentment directed at him. (That was his head-on-a-pike period.)



ROBERT RISKO

Once Moynihan was in the Senate, he became an unreliable neoconservative. He did not join in the general neocon enthusiasm for Ronald Reagan. He opposed a series of hawkish foreign ventures, including the first Gulf War, and had a soft spot for international law. Though he was probably more an intellectual than a politician, Moynihan was more a politician, by far, than most intellectuals. He had a politician's physical immediacy. I remember once, during an interview, being summoned into the private bathroom of his Senate office so that we could keep talking while he changed shirts and shaved (somewhat alarmingly, without cream).

As an elected officeholder, he was tethered to the earth much more firmly than most intellectuals are. He had to be a reasonably loyal Democrat; cater to labor unions, minority organizations, and other interest groups affiliated with his party; steer federal spending in the direction of New York State; and, above all, build up a record that would move voters to elect him, as they did, four times. He was, however, temperamentally inclined to pessimism about sweeping, gestural undertakings in just about every realm except public architecture, where he left his main non-written legacy, in the form of the rejuvenated Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington and—some day—a new Pennsylvania Station in New York. As Moynihan, with an unerring sense of the dramatics of his own life and of the larger significance of moments, surely would have wanted to point out, it's sad and ironic that his voice is gone just when his old political allies, who may have stopped agreeing with him but who never stopped listening, were confidently embarking on a project to remake a distant and perilous part of this perpetually disappointing world. ♦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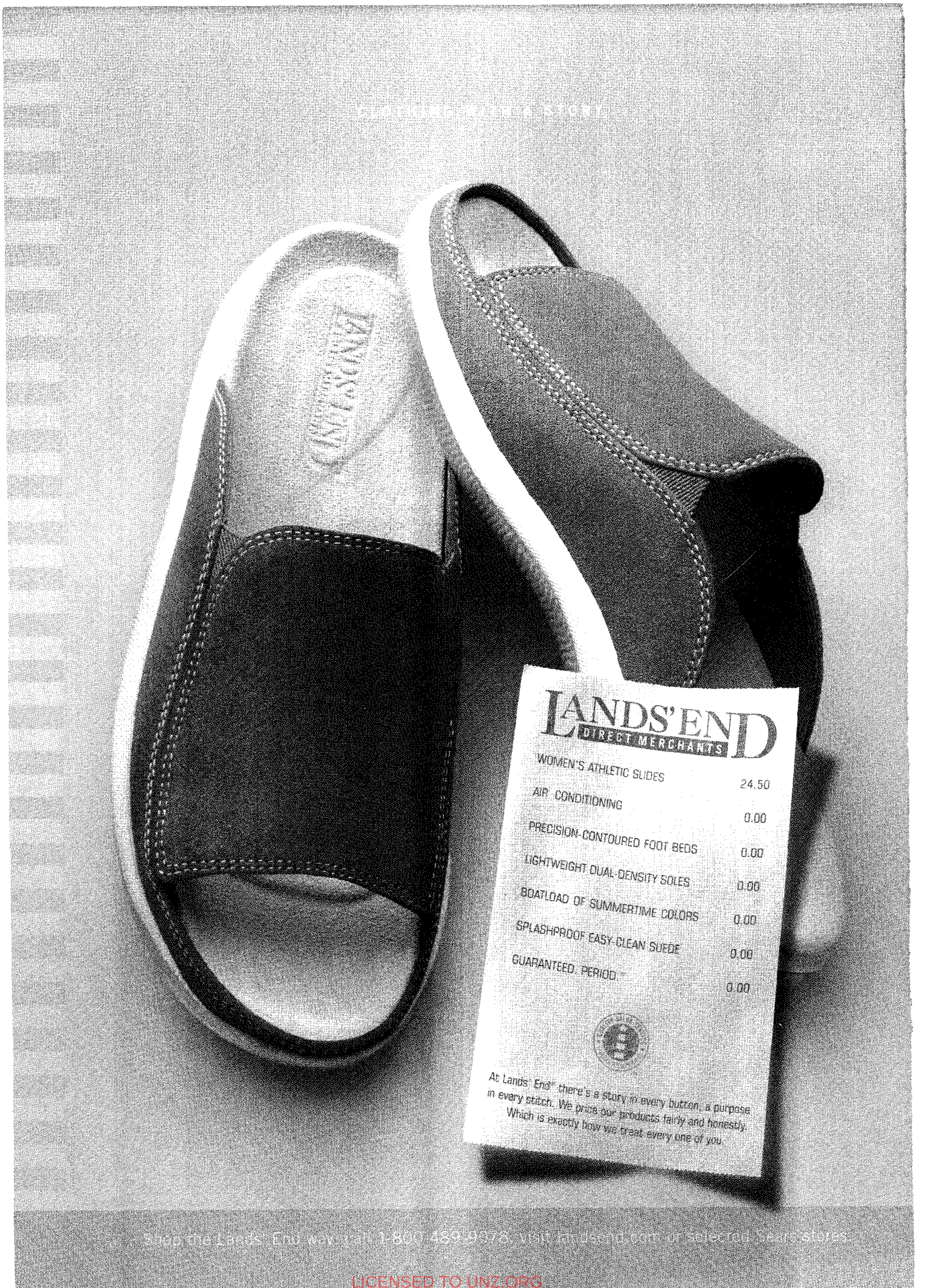

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